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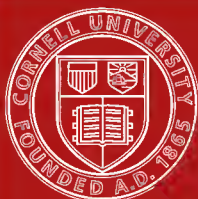
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THE PRESS IN WAR-TIME



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THE PRESS IN WAR-TIME

With Some Account of the Official Press Bureau

AN ESSAY

BY

SIR EDWARD COOK, K.B.E.

“The whole art of War consists in getting at what is on the other side of the hill.”—THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON.

“In a nation of liberty there is hardly a person in the whole mass of the people more absolutely necessary than a Censor.”—STEELE in *The Tatler*.

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NOTE

THIS essay was left behind him by the author ready for publication. In seeing it through the press his brother has been very kindly helped by Sir Frank Swettenham, G.C.M.G., C.H., the colleague of the author in the Directorship of the Official Press Bureau. He also allows me to quote him as follows : " Your brother sent me the manuscript of the essay in August, and I told him I agreed entirely with what he had written. I thought he had rendered a public service in explaining the working of the Press Bureau, which was never understood by anyone outside the office. Considering all the circumstances, the Press, with very few exceptions, bore the infliction of the Bureau admirably, and by their patriotic attitude and help contributed largely to the success of the Allies."

I have also to thank Mr. J. A. Spender for permission to reprint, and with additions, the obituary notice, which he wrote, and published in the *Westminster Gazette* of the second of October.

A. M. C.

November, 1919.

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INTRODUCTION

“It has long been a grave question,” said Abraham Lincoln during the American Civil War, “whether any Government not too strong for the liberties of its people can be strong enough to maintain its existence in great emergencies.” The World War of 1914-1918 brought this question to the supreme test. In it democracy was on trial, and democracy won, but the victory, in respect of some popular liberties, as in other and greater matters, was purchased at a price. Two ideals were at grips in the long and deadly struggle—the ideal of liberty and public right on the one side, and on the other the ideal of a State organised on a basis of might. The combatant who had pursued the latter ideal got his blows in first, and this fact tempted some minds in the other camp to hanker after the methods of organisation congenial to Prussian militarism. They were willing, as it seemed to those who disagreed with them, *propter vitam, vivendi perdere causas*. On the other hand there were some who, unmindful of President Lincoln’s warning, seemed willing

propter vivendi causas, perdere vitam. The problem before the free nations, when challenged by Prussian militarism, was thus one of compromise. The way in which the problem was solved by the organisation of British democracy in the various departments of national life and effort will be a subject of study and discussion by historians and politicians for many years to come, and the study will be full of interest, guidance, and warning. To make a contribution to it by setting forth the principles and working of the compromise in a particular field, with which the writer had some special opportunities of being familiar,¹ is the purpose of this Essay.

The field is that of the Press. A free Press is one of the instruments and safeguards of liberty. Yet censorship of the Press is a necessity of a struggle such as that from which we have emerged. A hundred years ago in Revolutionary France, it caused some surprise that a democracy accepted the rigorous censorship established by Napoleon, who forbade the papers to publish any military information unless it were derived from the Official Journal. The French people, it was explained, were willing to sacrifice the liberty of the Press to the hope of obtaining victory over their enemies. A French Prime

¹ During the previous South African War, he was for some time editor of a London daily paper, and afterwards a writer on another paper. At the beginning of the Great War he was for a time engaged in propaganda work.

Minister during the Great War of 1914-1918 was assailed in the name of Liberty for putting fetters upon the Press. "It is in vain," he replied, "that you talk only of the principles of Liberty. Liberty! But know you not what is the true way to defend it? Never forget, gentlemen, that if victory should not be ours, Liberty will be dead for us and for the world."¹

In this country the same necessity of restricting freedom in order not to lose it was accepted by most responsible persons,² but the forces which made against any severe restraint of the Press were strong. A free Press is one of the liberties to which Britishers are most dearly wedded. England, as those now living had hitherto known it, was a land where, girt with friends or foes, a man might speak or read or write the thing he will. The play of free thought, the clash of free discussion, the liberty of unlicensed printing, are the loom on which is woven that Public Opinion which is the sovereign power in a democratic State. Every morning at his breakfast table, or every afternoon with his midday rest, the Britisher had these liberties renewed to

¹ Speech of M. Briand, reported in the papers of January 26, 1916.

² The point was put in this passage from an article in the *Daily Chronicle* of November 9, 1915: "Liberals who are inclined to wax warm (as we notice some are) on behalf of the abstract freedom of the Press, would do well to ask themselves whether the way to make Liberalism and democracy triumph in the world is to impose on Liberal democracies in war-time such a gigantic military handicap as an uncensored Press would be."

him. Former wars had seen little or no curtailment of them. During the Crimean War there had been no censorship. In the South African War the censorship, such as there was, had been exercised far away, and no evidence of it was perceptible at home. The censorship of the Press was thus as unfamiliar as it was unwelcome. The Press, being itself used to play the part of universal censor, was in no mood to let its liberties be restricted without its consent. The result was that restriction was not enforced with logical rigour, and that the censorship was full of difficulties, anomalies, and inconsistencies. Nevertheless, the scheme worked with less friction than might have been expected. The exposition attempted in this Essay may thus be found of interest, not only as showing how liberty was reconciled with restraint, but also as illustrating the British knack of working an illogical system.

A further purpose may, it is hoped, be served by bringing into their proper relation the functions which the Press should discharge in war-time, and by illustrating the true principles of censorship. These latter were little understood in our country, and criticisms in Parliament and the Press did not always tend to elucidate them.

In describing and discussing the compromise by which the Press in this country was at once left free and placed in custody, I first endeavour to define the various functions which belong to the

Press in war-time, and show that for their effective discharge a large measure of freedom is essential (Chapter I). I then discuss the case for restraint, and describe the steps in that direction taken by the Government at the outbreak of the war (Chapter II). The curious form of Press Control which was adopted as a compromise between the two points of view is next explained (Chapter III). A description of the Press Bureau, which was the official organ for carrying out that control, follows (Chapter IV). In the hope of making the description more actual, an account of an imaginary but typical day in the Directors' Office at the Bureau is then given by way of interlude (Chapter V). The necessary difficulties and imperfections of the work are next reviewed (Chapter VI). The principles and practice of the Press Censorship are then described under the several heads of things forbidden by the Defence of the Realm Regulations (Chapters VII and VIII). This detailed examination is followed by some general discussion of principles of efficient censorship and of corresponding fallacies (Chapter IX). Having thus described the censorship of the Press as it was exercised, I return to the point from which the Essay started, illustrate the freedom with which the Press was left to perform the functions which pertain to it in war-time, and offer a few observations upon the manner in which they were in fact discharged.

THE PRESS IN WAR-TIME

CHAPTER I

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE PRESS IN WAR-TIME— THE CASE FOR FREEDOM

IN a free country the Press has an important part to play in war-time. It is important in all wars, and it is more than ever so in a prolonged and desperate struggle, such as that now ended, which was not so much a war of fleets and armies as a war of whole nations. The Press is a main organ for forming and expressing Public Opinion, and thus has committed to its charge the holding of what has been called "the Home Front." Next, it is the principal, and almost the sole, medium for the publication of news from the other fronts. Thirdly, it has in its hands, concurrently with Parliament, the power of criticising, and therein of weakening or of strengthening, those responsible for the conduct of the war. And, lastly, the Press is, consciously and unconsciously alike, a principal organ of propaganda, whereby

the cause of its country may be weakened or strengthened in foreign lands. Of these four divisions of the functions of the Press in war-time, each is bound up with the others. The expression of public opinion at home, for instance, must necessarily influence the formation of public opinion elsewhere. A newspaper, again, which attached great weight to its rôle as a propagandist would do well to exercise caution in its criticisms. And, lastly, the function of the Press as purveyor of news is obviously bound up closely with all the other functions. "You ask me," wrote an able editor in the early months of the war, "what it is like to conduct a newspaper in time of war, and I can tell you it is a pretty difficult business"; and one of his illustrations bears upon the point. News may be presented in many ways, and according as one or another is adopted, the tone of the Home Front may be affected, and the views of neutrals be influenced. "Belligerents," said the editor, "are partisans, and their official communications are *ex parte* statements. There is no complaint to make about this. A stout heart makes the best, and not the worst, of the things that go wrong; a fighting General will not want to let the enemy know when he is hard hit. A great reverse or a great victory cannot be concealed, but there have not been half a dozen actions in the whole war [up to June, 1915] to which either name can properly be given, and the vast majority of incidents reported

from day to day are on the border-line between positive and negative, and, without any intention to deceive, may be presented in one way or another.”¹ The classes into which the functions of the Press have been divided above are thus not mutually exclusive, and the Press sometimes made a mistake by not remembering their close inter-relation ; but it will be convenient here, and in some other parts of the discussion, to deal with them separately and in order.

(A).—*The Press as Guardian of the Home Front.*

Marshal Foch, in one of those modest speeches which are characteristic of the great Captain, said that he had done nothing except translate into appropriate action at the Front the Public Opinion of the allied peoples. “The same spirit animated the entire population. Like the Government, the people wanted to win at any price. . . . I had but to inspire myself with the sentiments of all our soldiers, and certain victory was bound to emerge from the National Will formally expressed.”² However this may be, it is certainly true that in the Great War the Public Opinion of the country was, to a degree unexampled in our history, solidly behind the Government in the will to victory, and that if it had not been so, victory

¹ A “Letter to the Antipodes,” in the *Westminster Gazette*, June 2, 1915.

² Speech at the Guildhall, July 30, 1919.

would have been impossible. It is an intricate question, which would repay more analysis than is necessary here, how far the Press creates, and how far it follows and expresses, the main body of Public Opinion. The question is further complicated by the fact that the term "the Press" is used to cover a great number of variously opinioned newspapers. There were instances of sudden conversions among the papers as also among the politicians, and in such cases they followed rather than led the prevailing course of Public Opinion. Again, there were some papers which seized the true implications of the German challenge from the first and which remained staunch to the end in determination to fight it out. There were others which fainted by the way, and were inclined to think the price of final victory too high. But taking a broad view of the Press and giving due weight to the organs with the largest circulation, we may say that the Press was among the forces which contributed to form, express, and sustain that national will which Marshal Foch and our own commanders translated into military action. Even in matters with regard to which the newspapers cannot claim to have created the national impulse, they must yet be credited with much influence in reinforcing and sustaining it. Men of all classes rushed to the colours, and did not wait for newspapers to urge them. But the impulse was strengthened by the emphasis which the news-

papers gave to Lord Kitchener's call to arms, and by the daily accounts which they published of what this or that class or locality was doing. Great influence must be attributed to the forces of suggestion, encouragement, and rivalry which were thus brought into action and which could not have been so powerfully exerted in any other way. When the time came for further sacrifices and efforts in other directions, the Press took a yet more important part in organising the Home Front. Political philosophers have shown that, in a free country (and probably in any country), Government and Law may be a little, but cannot be very far, in advance of Public Opinion ; and the newspapers served a useful purpose in preparing the way for further steps in the organisation of the country for the stubborn work which confronted it. They were the *avant-couriers* of necessary policy. This was conspicuously the case with the gradual formation of Public Opinion in favour of compulsory military service and of food-control. The Press helped both to carry the Home Front forward and to keep it staunch.

(B).—*The Press as Purveyor of News.*

The primary and essential function of the newspapers is to gather and distribute news, and in a free country the exercise of this function is of special importance in war-time. At many stages in this discussion the reader will be

reminded, though indeed little reminder is necessary, of the eagerness with which the public desired news of a struggle which was touching the nation's life at every point and absorbing all its best energies. Public Opinion is only wholesome when it is founded upon a sufficient knowledge of fact. It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of the part which an efficient Press can play in war-time both as providing material for the formation of opinion upon the issues involved and as recording the successive stages and phases of the struggle.

(C).—*The Press as Critic.*

With the next division of the functions of the Press in war-time, we reach more debatable ground. In peace the Press is nothing if not critical, and its criticism is a wheel in the machinery of government by party. Is it equally desirable in war? The answers which different men will give to the question are likely in large measure to be coloured by party or personal prepossessions. According to Lord French, it was by manipulation of a critical Press that he saved the Army and the country. This is contentious matter, but the comment which one Minister has made upon it does not dispose of Lord French's claim. "He sometimes saw the expression, *The Shell Shortage Controversy*. There was no controversy. What well-informed man

ever disputed the fact that there was a shortage? It was impossible for any man who spoke to a soldier who came back in the early months of the war to question the shortage. It was not Colonel Repington's article in the newspapers—he might have published a hundred articles, and politicians might have intrigued in vain for a century, and nothing would have happened if the facts had not been as grim and as grisly as they were; and no adequate steps were taken to remedy that shortage until the time that the necessary powers were given in the Ministry of Munitions Act and the Defence of the Realm Regulations Act.”¹ Of course, criticism, whether in the Press or elsewhere, can only be effective and serviceable when it is founded on facts. Of course, too, criticism is futile unless it be translated into appropriate action. The question is whether the criticism in the newspapers served to advance the time when the necessary powers were taken for remedying an admitted shortage. “The Shell Shortage Controversy” is not yet settled. Let us go back, therefore, to a page of history from which the dust of controversy has been laid, in order to illustrate the useful part which the criticism of a powerful Press may play in war-time.

The most famous war-correspondent of the

¹ Speech by Mr. Kellaway, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Munitions, in the House of Commons, June 24, 1919.

Victorian era committed serious indiscretions, as will presently be recalled ; but it is conceded by the best authorities that he also saved a British Army. "Custom," says Sir Evelyn Wood, "and an acquired sentiment of reticence under privations tied the tongues and pens of our chiefs. William Howard Russell dared to tell his employers, and through them the English-speaking peoples, that our little army was perishing from want of proper food and clothing. He probably made mistakes, as his statements, often hurriedly written, were necessarily based on incomplete information. He incurred much enmity, but few unprejudiced men who were in the Crimea will now attempt to call in question the fact that by awakening the conscience of the British nation to the sufferings of the troops he saved the remnant of those grand battalions we landed in September." A similar claim has been made for the leading articles in *The Times* of that period, and history records that Russell's letters, with the conclusions which Delane drew from them, destroyed a Ministry and imparted new vigour to the conduct of a war.¹ Whether in this respect history repeated itself during the Great War, it will be for the future historian to say ; but I do not know that Governments have become more impeccable than they were in Victorian days, and, without entering upon still controversial

¹ A reader who desires further particulars may be referred to Chapter IV of my *Delane of The Times*.

ground, I shall probably carry the reader with me in the opinion that the Press as critic may still perform a useful function in war-time.

(D).—*The Press as Propagandist.*

The last function of the Press in war-time is one which it is bound to discharge whether it will or not. The Press might with advantage have been more closely associated than it was with the business of propaganda ; but, even as things were, it did more than all the other agencies combined to make or mar the work. And such must always be the case in a country with a highly developed Press. It is the reporter-in-chief to the nation, and in that capacity it holds up to the rest of the world a mirror of the country's activities, thought, purposes, and *moral*. How conscious our enemy was of this function of the British Press will be seen presently.

Such, then, are the functions which belong to the Press in war-time. A little reflection will show that for the due discharge of them in a free country a large measure of freedom in the Press is essential. The Press has, first, to hold the Home Front, and it can only do this effectively if it is largely free to go its own way and follow its own methods. It has been said by one of the Ministers¹ that it was "the unity of the Press

¹ Sir Eric Geddes at a Press dinner, *Times*, July 9, 1919.

which gave the Government power" during the war. And subject to one qualification the statement may be accepted. What made the unity impressive and powerful was that it was unity in diversity. Public Opinion, in the sense of the predominant view of an indeterminate number of men and women, is the resultant of many opinions, and the very fact that the Press reflected many differences of view and temper made its unity on the whole the more significant. Public Opinion under a democracy cannot be turned out to the order of any Government.

News, in similar fashion, is like to be regarded as suspect unless it is known to be in large measure independent. It is true that the news reported by the Press during the war was not always trustworthy. I was talking one day to an agricultural worker—a member of that class which, by those who do not know it, is sometimes supposed to be behind the average in natural shrewdness. He said to me that he "never believed in a battle till he saw that it was off." I did not at first tumble to his meaning. I thought he was a philosopher who regarded the end. Presently I remembered that *OFF* was the journalistic abbreviation on posters and in stop-press news for *OFFICIAL*, and it appeared that what my friend meant was that he discounted newspaper accounts until they were confirmed by official *communiqués*. But this attitude had, no doubt, a

reverse side, and official accounts were the more accepted when confirmed by unofficial reports. So, too, with regard to home news, the free reporting of minority views, the free canvassing of unpopular opinions, must give greater weight to the rest.

That a wide measure of freedom is necessary if criticism is to be of any use needs no illustration. Criticism in fetters is not criticism at all.

And, lastly, if propaganda through the Press is to be effective, it must be independent. A point of view, or an argument, if it appears simultaneously in a hundred newspapers in the same guise may have a certain value, but the value must be less than that of a number of independent articles, even if the latter reveal a certain difference of view or opinion.

Such seem to be the reasons which point to the desirability of a Free Press in war-time. And whatever may have been the reasoning, the fact is that, under each of the heads into which I have divided the functions of the Press, it was left throughout the war in possession of a very wide freedom. This is a proposition which will be illustrated fully in later stages of our inquiry. Here a short and summary statement may serve. The expression of Public Opinion was for the most part left unfettered. No European country had so much news of the war as was contained in the

British Press. In criticism our Press were able to exercise a liberty which in the opinion of many passed into licence. And the value of Press propaganda was recognised alike by the permission given for the export of our newspapers to neutral countries (from which, of course, they reached the enemy), and by the withdrawal of such permission in special cases. Permission was throughout the war the rule ; prohibition the exception.¹

That the policy of leaving a wide measure of freedom to the Press was justified by results may be concluded by considering the opposite case of Germany. In the course of a debate on the German Censorship, Herr Stresemann (National Liberal) exhorted the German Government, though with the usual unctuous note, to learn from its enemy. "The world-war is only to be won," he said, "with public opinion. In this art England has been a past-master, even if she has partly acted against us in a hypocritical and criminal manner, which we shall not imitate. A weighty fact, too, is that at home we have been often misled because from newspaper cuttings which were prepared for us we were only allowed to hear favourable opinions, such as were friendly to Germany, so that we were startled as out of a dream when we suddenly saw facing us nothing

¹ The exception which made the most stir was the prohibition (afterwards withdrawn) of the export of the *Nation* in 1917 : this was fully debated in the House of Commons on April 17, 1917.

but hatred, envy and hostility, even in neutral countries. We underrate the value of home public opinion for the issue of the war. We can bear the fresh breath of criticism. . . . In England they read accounts of battles and attacks. That is due to a feeling of strength and greatness. We also should speak openly at home.”¹ Who can say how often the possibility of an earlier and easier peace was lost to our enemies, and how much of the final collapse of their Home Front was caused, by the close fetters in which their Press was confined?

Such, then, was the case, which prevailed in our free country, in favour of a free Press. But now comes the antinomy. It was recognised that there were powerful reasons in favour of a free Press; but experience and reflection showed that there were reasons of at least equal cogency in favour of limiting its freedom. The nature of these reasons, the measure of restraint which was adopted, and the methods by which the restraint was exercised are the subjects of the following chapters.

¹ Report in the *Daily Telegraph*, January, 20, 1916.

CHAPTER II

THE CASE FOR RESTRAINT OF THE PRESS

IN the early days of the war an editor who likes to think out his questions in public for the benefit of his readers printed an article entitled "The Duty of a Newspaper." In view of criticism of the Censorship, he started the question whether it might not be a better plan to leave every editor to be his own censor. "We are tempted," he said, "to fancy sometimes that we should be in no greater danger if there were no Press Censorship at all. Free rein would be given, of course, to every sort of inaccuracy, wild surmise, and 'perilous disclosure,' to use Kinglake's phrase, and though the exact truth would of course be published in the medley—and would be extremely damaging to our interests if it were known by the enemy to be the truth—it would probably be almost impossible for him to disentangle it from other statements that flatly contradicted it." He went on to argue "about it and about," and concluded that, though a policy of complete freedom might conceivably answer,

and though "it would be intensely interesting to see the result of such an experiment," yet the risk was too great.¹ It was indeed! The experiment had been tried in an earlier war.

The risk was too great in view of the near and terrible nature of the war, in view of the temptations which must always assail the newspapers in such matters, and in view, lastly, of certain conditions special to this particular war—conditions which the Press and the public did not always sufficiently bear in mind.

(A).—*The Greatness of the Risk.*

The experiment of going to war without a Censorship and of leaving every editor to act, or not to act, as his own censor had already been tried. Here is an extract from a letter which Lord Raglan wrote from "Before Sebastopol" on November 13, 1854, to the Secretary for War :—

The perusal of the article in the *Times* of the 23rd of October, headed "The War," obliges me in discharge of my duty to draw your Grace's attention to the consequences that may arise from the publication of details connected with the Army. The knowledge of them must be invaluable to the Russians, and in the same degree detrimental to H.M.'s troops. . . . You will perceive that it is there stated that our losses from cholera are very great; that the Light Division encampment is kept on the alert by shot and shell which pitch into the

¹ The *Spectator*, November 13, 1915.

middle of it; that 40 pieces of artillery have been sent to our park, and twelve tons of gunpowder safely deposited in a mill, the position of which is described, and which of course must be accurately known by the enemy; that the Second Division had moved and taken ground in the vicinity of the Fourth Division, in which a shell had fallen with fatal effect in a tent occupied by some men of the 63rd Regiment; and that the French would have 60 heavy guns, the British 50, and 60 more would be supplied by the Navy. . . . I am quite satisfied that the object of the writer is simply to satisfy the anxiety and curiosity, I may say, of the public, and to do what he considers his duty by his employers, and that it has never occurred to him that he is serving much more essentially the cause of the Russians, and is encouraging them to persevere in throwing shells into our camps and to attempt the destruction of the mill where our powder is reported by him to have been deposited. But the innocency of his intention does not diminish the evil he inflicts.

One has only to read this letter in order to understand Lord Wolseley's well-known description of the Special Correspondent as "the curse of modern armies." Russell, we are told, readily admitted and deplored his fault, and the pleas which he entered in mitigation of judgement are full of interest.¹ He explained, first, that when the letter was dispatched everyone, including Lord Raglan himself, was sure that the Allies would be in Sebastopol before the letter could reach London. The correspondent speculated on the course of future events, and gave the benefit of a doubt in favour of publicity. Russell's second

¹ *The Life of Sir W. H. Russell*, by J. B. Atkins, Vol. I. Ch. XVII.

line of defence was equally significant. "I am writing," he said, "for *The Times*, and it is for the editor on the spot to decide what ought to be made public and what ought to be suppressed in my correspondence." Delane knew that Sebastopol had not fallen as was expected by his correspondent, but the letter was still allowed to appear. Yet Delane was a careful editor, and, in Kinglake's phrase, almost "a Patriot King." Such was the lesson which the experience of the Crimean War had to teach about the risk of leaving the Press wholly free. Great as was the risk then, it would have been infinitely greater now. The means of rapid communication had vastly increased, and with them the harm which might be caused by any indiscreet publication. The issues at stake were infinitely greater, and the peril which must have attended the conveyance of information to the enemy was terrible. "It was by the bold use of the censorship," said Sir John Simon in December 1914, "that the whole of the British Expeditionary Force crossed the Channel and was safely established on the other side without the slightest risk of attack on the way. It was by the bold use of the censorship that, at a later stage, the British Army in France was moved from the centre of the Allies' line to the extreme left in order to resist the German advance upon Calais. When the history of these things comes to be written, the absolute necessity of such a censorship, in

order to prevent the enemy gaining advantages which might change the whole course of events, will become apparent to everybody.”¹ The risk of leaving secrecy at the mercy of inadvertence or enterprise would truly have been too great.

(B).—*The Temptation of the Newspapers.*

It is probable that no one who has not himself been engaged in the work of journalism can fully realise the temptation to which the newspapers must be exposed in war-time. The strength of it does not arise merely from the craving to make what is called in journalese a “scoop” or a “beat,” powerful though that craving may be, for journalism is a fiercely competitive business. The temptation comes in a form more insidious and more difficult, with the best will in the world, to resist. The gathering of news for publication is bred in the bone of every good journalist. The journalists in a free country have lived in an atmosphere of complete liberty to indulge their bent. They have been brought up to believe, and in normal times the belief is well founded, that free publicity is in the national interest. If any doubtful case arises in war-time, they are thus inevitably biased in favour of publicity.² The representative of an important American news agency

¹ Speech at Bolton, *Times*, December 9, 1914.

² The incident related above of Sir William Russell's indiscretion is a case in point.

once sought an interview with me on the Press Censorship, and I remember saying to him that Sir Frank Swettenham and I must make one condition. My friend supposed I meant that he must submit what he wrote to be censored. But I was not thinking of that. I explained that we never censored articles or telegrams criticising the Censorship. The condition I wanted to make was, I said, that "you should not speak too much good of our censorship." (A very unnecessary condition, I must admit, but my friend was particularly cordial and indulgent—it is an insinuating way that interviewers have.) "So do not give us any flowers," I said. "It would really be a terrible blow if you did. The enterprising newspaper or news-agency and an efficient censorship are natural enemies; and if the day should ever come when the newspapers, British or Neutral, conspired to praise the Press Bureau, it would be a catastrophe for one or other of us; it would mean either that the journalists had lost their go, or that our Censors here had been neglecting their duty."

The strength of the temptation, which I have described and at which in this friendly talk I meant to hint, is by implication admitted, I think, in the congratulations which journalists have addressed to each other now that the war is over. More than once it has been reported of banquets that speakers mentioned proudly, as proof of the

virtue and public service of the Press, the fact that the Navy was mobilised without a word appearing in the newspapers. Disclosure would have been an act of treachery to the State. That representative journalists should dwell upon the reticence can only be due to a feeling of the strength of the temptation which had to be resisted.

The risk, then, of leaving the Press wholly uncontrolled was in the light of experience felt to be too great. And in addition to these general considerations there were conditions special to the late war which made legislation in restraint of the Press and the establishment of some form of Press Censorship imperatively necessary.

(C).—*The Need for a Cable Censorship.*

It was a world war, in which, generally speaking, the world's means of rapid communication were in the hands of the Government of this country. This fact involved great dangers, and great responsibility for avoiding them. Our country gave hospitality to many neutrals, and a neutral journalist is exposed to all the temptations described above, whilst as a neutral he need not be restrained by the motives which apply to a belligerent. We gave also unwilling hospitality, no doubt, to enemy agents. It would have been criminal folly to have allowed unrestricted use of the cables to all and sundry. Then, again, it was a war in which one of our most formidable

weapons was the blockade, and an effective blockade would have been impossible unless the cable service had been closely watched and restrained. This could only have been done by a strict cable censorship.

(D).—*The Interests of our Allies.*

Furthermore, as holders of the cables, we were guardians of the interests of our many Allies, among whom some of the more important had very strong views about the need of a strict censorship of the Press in war-time. It is recorded that the Austrian concentration on the river Bistritz in 1866 was disclosed to the Prussian commander by a telegram which reached Berlin *via* London¹; and that "it was a passage in a certain London paper about August 26, 1870, which put the Germans on the track of the French Army and enabled Moltke to win Sedan."² A Prussian officer who was in England in 1870 wished to come back and take his place in the fighting line. It is said that Moltke told him that he could do much better service to the Army where he was. "My chief duty," he said, "was to study each morning every line coming from

¹ This instance was recalled in an interesting article on "Press Control in War Time" in the *Nation* of August 14, 1915.

² See a message from Berne in the *Morning Post* of April 26, 1915. This case, with some others from earlier wars, had already been cited by Mr. Charles Whibley in a letter to *The Times*, September 1, 1914.

France in the correspondence columns of British newspapers. Every descriptive hint was of importance. Suppose that the correspondent had seen the sun glinting on brass helmets ; we had a table of every detail of accoutrement for every regiment in the French Army, and knew likewise to what corps or division each belonged. The brass helmets seen at A, when such and such regiments had last been heard of at B, enabled Moltke to calculate in what direction a portion of the French Army was marching."¹

In France they have long memories ; and what would have been thought and felt if this 'country had not taken adequate measures to prevent not only indiscretions in our own Press, but also, since in a large measure we had the power, to prevent the leakage of indiscretions into the neutral Press.

Such were presumably the reasons which led the Government to take measures at the beginning of the war which led to restraint of the Press. The measures were two.

It was often asked what right the British Government, and its servant the Press Bureau, had to interfere with telegraphic messages. The answer is very simple, but was not so generally known as it might have been. Acting in ac-

¹ This is from a conversation with the officer in question recorded by the late Master of Balliol (Mr. Strachan-Davidson) in a letter to the *Morning Post* of April 28, 1915.

cordance with powers reserved in the International Telegraph Convention, the British Government issued a notification upon the outbreak of war that the telegraphic and radio-telegraphic services throughout the Empire would be suspended ; but the notification added that "with a view to minimise inconvenience to the public His Britannic Majesty's Government will, until further notice, and as an act of grace, permit the transmission of such telegrams and radio-telegrams in plain language as foreign Governments or the public choose to send, provided that such telegrams and radio-telegrams are written in English or French, and on the understanding that they are accepted at the sender's risk and subject to censorship by the British authorities ; that is, that they may be stopped, delayed, or otherwise dealt with in all respects at the discretion of those authorities and without notice to the senders ; and that no claims in respect of them, whether for the reimbursement of the sums paid for transmission or otherwise, will be considered by His Majesty's Government in any circumstances whatever." A similar notification was issued to the British public.

Everybody thus knew, or ought to have known, the conditions upon which telegrams were filed. We sometimes wondered whether it was realised by American, foreign, and other correspondents that, instead of regarding every instance of a stopped telegram as an act of wrong, they ought,

by the letter of the law, to recognise every passed telegram as an act of grace. The grace was, as will be seen later, very freely extended, but occasionally when an unreasonable complaint was made on the question of right we found it useful to read the Notification to the complainant. It was generally news to him.

The assumption of control over the cables and wireless stations involved, it will be seen, a Government Censorship.

The second measure in restraint of the Press, which led to the same result, was the Defence of the Realm Act and the issue of Regulations under it. The Regulations which most closely and which permanently concerned the Press were as follows¹ :—

Reg. 18.—No person shall without lawful authority collect, record, publish or communicate, or attempt to elicit, any information with respect to the movement, numbers, description, condition,

¹ There were many others which (*a*) indirectly or occasionally touched the Press ; and others, again, (*b*) issued for special and temporary purposes, which concerned the Press directly. But I am anxious to avoid detail where it is not essential to my main argument. Instances of (*a*) are Regulations 8B (employment of workmen) and 41D (sending remittances out of the country). These Regulations affected advertisements, and gave the Censors, as well as the newspapers, much trouble. Instances of (*b*) are Regulations 18C (works on war training), 27A (secret sessions, etc.), 27AA (the Irish Convention), and 27C (leaflets). It may be remarked in passing that those persons who supposed the Censorship to be concerned only with naval and military affairs can never have read the Regulations.

or disposition of any of the forces, ships, or aircraft of His Majesty or any of His Majesty's allies, or with respect to the plans or conduct, or supposed plans or conduct, of any operations by any such forces, ships, or aircraft, or with respect to the supply, description, condition, transport, or manufacture, or storage, or place or intended place of manufacture or storage of war material, or with respect to any works or measures undertaken for or connected with, or intended for the fortification or defence of any place,¹

or any information of such a nature as is calculated to be or might be directly or indirectly useful to the enemy,

and if any person contravenes the provisions of this regulation, or without lawful authority or excuse has in his possession any document containing any such information as aforesaid, he shall be guilty of an offence against these regulations. . . .

No person shall without lawful authority publish or communicate any information relating to the passage of any ship along any part of the coast of the United Kingdom. . . .

Reg. 27.—No person shall by word of mouth or in writing or in any newspaper, periodical, book, circular, or other printed publication—

- (a) spread false reports or make false statements ; or
- (b) spread reports or make statements intended or likely to cause disaffection to His Majesty, or to interfere with the success of His Majesty's forces or of the forces of any of His Majesty's Allies by land or sea, or to prejudice His Majesty's relations with foreign Powers ; or
- (c) spread reports or make statements intended or likely to prejudice the recruiting of persons to serve in any of His Majesty's forces, or in any body of persons enrolled for employment under the Army Council or Air Council or entered for service under the direction

¹ I have broken up the text of the Regulation at this point for a reason explained below, p. 88.

- of the Admiralty, or in any police force or fire brigade, or to prejudice the training, discipline or administration of any such force, body or brigade ; or
- (d) spread reports or make statements intended or likely to undermine public confidence in any bank or currency notes which are legal tender in the United Kingdom or any part thereof, or to prejudice the success of any financial measures taken or arrangements made by His Majesty's Government with a view to the prosecution of the war ;

and if any person contravene any of the above provisions he shall be guilty of an offence against these regulations.

I have given these Regulations in their final form, but there were many successive alterations. So were there also in the Regulations with regard to procedure and punishments. The reader shall not be troubled unnecessarily with such details, but two outstanding alterations must be noticed because they show very clearly how anxious the Government was to make the law as little irksome as possible to the Press.

At first there was no distinction in matters of procedure and punishment between Press and other offences against the Regulations. The "competent naval or military authority" was the prosecuting authority, and procedure was to be by Court-martial. "I am asked," said Sir Stanley Buckmaster during a debate on the Censorship in the House of Commons (November 22, 1914), "what are the penalties. They are perfectly plain. If orders that are given for the safety of

the State are broken, the punishment is punishment by Court-martial—anything up to imprisonment for life.” The Press objected most strongly to its liberty being placed at the mercy of naval or military authority, and early in 1915 the Regulations about procedure were largely altered, and a little later (June 2) a new Regulation—56 (13)—was issued placing Press Offences in a category of their own. Such offences, “instead of being referred to the competent naval or military authority, shall be referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Lord Advocate, or the Attorney-General for Ireland.” I need not cite the rest of the Regulation. It will suffice to say that no prosecution of the Press became possible except (in England) on the motion of the Director of Public Prosecutions ; that all such prosecutions actually instituted were before a court of summary jurisdiction, with right of appeal from the magistrate to Quarter Sessions ; and that the maximum penalty for offences so tried was imprisonment with or without hard labour for six months, or a fine of £100, or both.¹

¹ In addition to punishment, the Regulations gave the Government some powers of prevention. Competent authority might seize the plant of a newspaper which had offended (Reg. 51) ; and in certain cases enter premises and seize type on suspicion that an offence was about to be committed (Reg. 51A). Curiously, this latter power applied to offences against Regulations 18 and 27, but the former power to offences against Regulation 27 only.

The other alteration in the Regulations to which I have referred is important to us here, not only as showing the anxiety of the Government to leave the Press with the widest possible measure of liberty, but also as supplying the explanation of some criticisms to which the Censorship was exposed. The Defence of the Realm Act as first passed gave the Government power to make Regulations "to prevent the spread of reports likely to cause alarm," and a Regulation in that sense was for a few weeks in force. When the matter was reconsidered in Parliament (on a Consolidation Bill), Lord Robert Cecil proposed, and the Solicitor-General (Sir Stanley Buckmaster, then Director of the Press Bureau) accepted, an amendment omitting the word "alarm"; and when the Act was passed with this amendment, the Regulation was similarly altered. As will be seen later on, the Press Bureau was necessarily exposed to a cross fire, being attacked not only for censoring too much but also for censoring too little. In particular it was often asked why such and such an alarmist statement was allowed to appear. The answer is that there was no longer legal power to prevent such statements.

(It will be worth while to refer to the debate in the House of Commons (November 25, 1914) in order to bring out the desire of the authorities to make control of the Press as little arbitrary as possible. The original wording, said Lord

Robert Cecil, "might lead to a suspicion that the power given was being used for the purpose of protecting the Government or making undue concealment. He recognised very fully both the desirability of the Censorship and the extreme difficulty of carrying out its duties. He agreed that neither the House nor the public would be well advised in criticising with great severity every single action of the Censorship, asking why this particular word or reference was omitted. At the same time he was sure those responsible for the Censorship would be the first to agree that nothing would be more disastrous than that an impression should get abroad that the powers of the Censor were being used for political purposes or for the purpose of undue concealment of misfortune or anything else of the kind, merely because they were likely to prove embarrassing or disagreeable or hurtful to the reputation of any particular Minister. The duties of the Censorship should be carried out," he said in conclusion, "with strict regard to the underlying principles upon which popular government in any form or shape must repose in this country." And that was entirely the view of the Director of the Press Bureau. "The noble lord," said Sir Stanley in accepting the amendment, "had expressed better than he could the exact principles which he thought should regulate the discharge of his duties. He agreed that this office should have no concern with politics. If

in the emergency of a great national crisis the Government had called into existence a body whose function it was to colour opinion in their favour they would have abused the confidence of the nation. He also agreed that the idea of keeping back news from the public because it was disagreeable to disclose it was a policy that should never be pursued. There might, however, be occasions on which the full disclosure of events—disasters or it might even be successes—might not be desirable. . . . He was very glad the amendments had been introduced. It was his desire as far as possible that the functions and duties of his office should be made plain. It was only by that being done that it might be possible some time, possibly after his office had ceased to exist, that the mists of misunderstanding and misrepresentation by which at the present moment the work of the office was surrounded should ultimately be cleared away.”

These speeches have in some ways carried us to a point which the general exposition of our subject has not yet reached, but they serve to illustrate the compromise on which the Press Censorship was founded. On the one hand, the vital interests of the country and its Allies were to be protected from the risks of dangerous publicity. On the other hand, the Press was to be allowed a very wide measure of freedom in view, in Lord Robert

Cecil's words, "of the underlying principles upon which popular government in this country must repose." The resulting system, at first improvised and gradually more clearly organised, is described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

THE SCHEME OF PRESS CENSORSHIP

IN describing the scheme of Censorship adopted during the Great War my object is to expound principles rather than to recount things in the order in which they occurred. I shall not trouble the reader, therefore, with details of the gradual development of the Official Press Bureau. These things are on record, if anyone hereafter should wish to know them, in full reports submitted by the Directors of the Bureau to the Home Secretary. The state of things described in the following pages is that which obtained when, after a brilliant improvisation by the first Director, the office was removed from a rabbit warren on the Admiralty side of Whitehall to more adequate quarters in the Royal United Service Institution opposite, and the Censorship, which had at first been divided between the Bureau and the General Post Office, was concentrated in Whitehall. With regard to the first few weeks I will only say that the division of the work was a hopeless arrangement, that everything was improvised in a hurry,

and that the quarters first allotted to the Bureau and to the censors at the Post Office were ridiculously inadequate and inconvenient. To anyone who knows the conditions under which the work was done, the wonder will seem, not that there were some miscarriages, but that there was anything else.

Before passing to describe the later system, it may be well for us to delimit the ground, for the general term "The Censorship" included three different establishments, and there was much confusion between them in the public mind and in the speeches of Members of both Houses of Parliament—confusion which the issue of explanatory Parliamentary Papers did not avail to remove.¹ One establishment was charged with the duty of censoring private and commercial telegrams. This was known as "The Cable Censorship." A second establishment, "The Postal Censorship," was concerned with everything which went, or was intended to go, by post, whether it were of a private, a commercial, or a Press nature. These two branches of "The Censorship" were under the control of the War Office, the Officer in charge of them being known at that Office as "The Chief Censor"—a title often confused with that of the Director of the Official Press Bureau. The Bureau had nothing to do with these two

¹ "Memorandum on the Censorship," 1915 (Cd. 7679), and "Memorandum on the Official Press Bureau," 1915 (Cd. 7680).

branches of censorship, though its relations with the Press section of the Postal Censorship were necessarily close and might with advantage have been closer.

There was another exercise of authority which was sometimes confused by speakers and writers with "The Censorship," though it had, in fact, little or nothing to do with it. Why, it was asked, does "the Censor" keep back despatches from the Generals? Why are the public not given official information from Russia? "The Censorship" was much to blame, it was said, for such "delays and concealment." All this was a misapprehension. The true state of the case was explained in the "Memorandum on the Censorship" above mentioned, but the misapprehension persisted. It was probably due in part to the fact that, as will be seen presently, the Official Press Bureau was an issuing as well as a censoring Department. The Bureau, however, was not responsible for the contents or non-contents of naval and military *communiqués*. These were composed either at the several fronts or at the Admiralty and War Office severally. And as for Despatches or other Papers gazetted or presented to Parliament, in peace time as in war it rests with the Government in the normal exercise of its discretion to decide what papers to present to Parliament and when to present them. No doubt in the case of naval and military despatches the

Admiralty and the Imperial General Staff respectively would have an influential voice, but this is not a case of the Censorship as established for war.

One branch of Censorship proper remains to be noticed before we come to the Press Bureau. With every unit at every front (and similarly in the Fleet) there were officers charged with the censorship of letters. The stamp upon letters from the front showing that they had been passed by a censor was a source of some confusion in connection with the censorship of the Press. It was sometimes supposed by recipients or editors that this stamp passed the contents of the letters for publication. Of course it did not. It merely passed them for delivery, and in every issue of the Bureau's instructions to the Press emphatic attention was called to this distinction. The Field Censors were innumerable. Their methods, and probably the standards of strictness, varied greatly. Inconsistencies and risks would have been very great and serious if the stamp of any and every Field Censor had been accepted as passing a communication for publication. It is probable that one or two of the most serious indiscretions on the part of the Press which I can remember were, in part at least, due to the confusion of which I have spoken. With one partial exception the only authority empowered to pass matter for publication was the Official Press Bureau.

The exception was in the case of messages from authorised correspondents at the several fronts. These messages were primarily (and compulsorily) censored by military censors on the spot, but they all came through the Press Bureau, which in case of need exercised a super-censorship. Such cases were very rare, but they occurred. It might be that the Intelligence Section at the front would telephone to us to do this or that to a certain message, or that they had advised us that such or such a message was reserved for our consideration, or again it might happen, but this was very seldom, that something struck us as doubtful, in view, it might be, of events or instructions later than the censor on the spot could have cognisance of, and in such cases, with or without reference to the War Office, the message would be amended at the Bureau. For the most part, however, the censorship exercised at Headquarters was accepted as final. The officers responsible for it were on the spot and were the best judges, in view of local conditions, of what could and what could not properly be said in print.

With the partial exception last described, the whole and sole work of Press Censorship, so far as related to matter intended for publication in this country and matter filed in cable form for publication elsewhere, was vested in the Official Press Bureau, the constitution of which will next be described.

Two points will strike every reader as characteristic of the British manner of doing things. One is the informal way in which the Bureau was constituted. The other is the large element of compromise and consent upon which the working of the Bureau rested. There were, as we shall see, many disadvantages in the informal and illogical nature of the proceedings, but given the problem as defined above,—the problem of combining essential restraint with a very wide measure of liberty,—it may be doubted whether a more formal and logical system, devised at the start with little experience to guide its framers, would not have been worse.

First, then, the Official Press Bureau came into existence in an informal way. I have spoken of powers as “vested” in it. But to speak strictly, no powers at all were vested in it until at a late stage of the war, and then the powers were limited to particular purposes. So, again, I have spoken of the Bureau’s “constitution.” But to speak strictly, it was never constituted at all—“it grewed.” Its existence was never mentioned in any Act or Regulation until April 22, 1916, when in connection with the proposal to hold a secret session of Parliament a Regulation was issued forbidding the publication of any report “except such as may be officially communicated through the Directors of the Official Press Bureau.” Perhaps it was the informal way in which the

Office came into being that explains those misunderstandings of which Sir Stanley Buckmaster spoke (above, p. 30). Certain it is that no one outside the Office, not even the Press, ever really understood the Press Censorship, or what had to be done and was done at the Official Press Bureau.

The formation of the Bureau had been announced to the House of Commons by Mr. Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, on August 7, 1914. "There are," he said, "a great many very disconcerting rumours spread about. These rumours arise from the fact that the censorship of the Press at present is of a very strict kind from the point of view of saying Aye or No to any particular piece of military information, and I think one consequence of that is that the newspapers in default of facts are rather inclined to fill up their columns with gossip which reaches them from irresponsible quarters along the coast, where no doubt a great deal of apprehension may in the minds of nervous individuals prevail. We are establishing to-day a Press Bureau, and I am very glad to say that the right hon. and learned member for the Walton Division of Liverpool will preside over it, and from that Bureau a steady stream of trustworthy information supplied both by the War Office and the Admiralty can be given to the Press."

The very strict censorship of which Mr.

Churchill spoke had up to that time been of a limited kind. Telegrams were censored by military censors at the Post Office, under the terms, as already explained, of the Proclamation ; and for the rest, the newspapers informally consulted the Admiralty or the War Office. Such informal consultation was in accord with an arrangement made in peacetime. "After the last war the question of the censorship of Press communications was from time to time the subject of consideration by the two departments mainly affected. Attempts to proceed by way of legislation failed, and the problem was left unsolved until about a year before the outbreak of the present war. An agreement was then reached by negotiation between the Press on the one hand and the Admiralty and War Office on the other, by which the former undertook to respect warnings given by the latter, and to withhold from publication information of which the exclusion from the papers appeared to the departments concerned to be desirable in the national interests. The working of this voluntary agreement was entrusted to and was watched carefully by a joint committee representing the Admiralty, War Office, and the Press."¹ This was the arrangement in force at the outbreak of

¹ "Memorandum on the Censorship." The "Admiralty, War Office and Press Committee" remained in being ; and, in order to preserve continuity, its Secretary was employed to send out the instructions issued to the Press by the Directors of the Official Press Bureau.

war, and Mr. Churchill paid a tribute to the discretion of the Press during the critical days at the beginning of August :—

“ With the indulgence of the House, perhaps I may be allowed to say that we owe a very great debt to the Press of this country. During the precautionary period, when we had no legal means of controlling them, the proprietors and editors of the great newspapers, irrespective of class or party, all combined together to take no notice of questions which the Admiralty and the War Office did not want referred to, and it was through that that our preparations were expeditiously and discreetly completed without undue alarm being caused in this country at a time when no explanation could have been given. We wish to deal throughout the war with the newspaper Press in such a way as to enable the people of this country to follow what is taking place reasonably and intelligibly. It is on a basis of that kind that panic and unnecessary alarm can best be avoided.”

The object of the formation of an Official Press Bureau was thus stated to be to supply official news to the Press, and to apply to war conditions a censorship which in peace had been informally exercised through the Committee above described.

Mr. Churchill put in the forefront, it will be seen, the function of the Bureau as an issuing

Department, but an account of this function may be deferred, as having little to do with censorship, to a later chapter.

The censorship was applied, however, not, except in one regard, by Regulation or duress, but on a voluntary system.

The censorship of incoming and outgoing telegrams was compulsory, because all such telegrams were diverted to the Press Bureau before delivery or dispatch. To deal with them was the first function of the Bureau.

In a second function there was no compulsion on the papers whatever. No editor was required to submit any matter (other than telegrams, which were dealt with before he saw them) to any censorship.¹ The non-telegraphic matter might be, and sometimes was, as dangerous as the telegraphic. From the point of view of logic, it was anomalous that the line of demarcation between the censored and the uncensored should be fixed by the medium through which information passed, and not by the subject-matter, of the information.² There is, however, an

¹ Messages from authorised correspondents with the British armies were, of course, subject to compulsory censorship, as also were those of correspondents with Allied armies.

² From time to time there were limited exceptions to the general statement made above. "Leaflets" of a propagandist character had to be submitted, but newspapers were exempted from the definition of leaflet. And there was a short-lived Regulation (June 25 to November 25, 1916) requiring the submission of articles of an "instructional," "technical," nature (Reg. 18C).

element of force in the distinction by medium. Information conveyed by telegram is, other things being equal, more potentially dangerous than information sent in a less speedy way. But a further reason for the distinction was based on convenience. It was very simple to divert all telegrams to a censorship office. To have required every editor to submit all matter of a stated kind to such an office would have raised very difficult questions of definition, and have imposed great inconvenience upon the Press. It was therefore decided—but was it ever in any strict sense “decided”? I doubt it. I do not know whether the Cabinet ever settled the precise limits and duties of the Official Press Bureau at the start. Perhaps I am wrong, but my impression is that the Office, having once been founded as described above, was left to work out its scope and methods as experience might suggest. At any rate it was somehow or other settled that except for telegrams there should be no compulsory censorship. The voluntary censorship assumed large proportions. The Bureau was established. It was to censor telegrams. It was to issue official statements. There it was, and it was available for consultation and advice. Being available, it was used, and the censorship, though nominally of telegrams only, became in fact general.

To what, it may well be asked, was this result

due? A general answer is, To the loyalty and sound discretion of the Press. The Government were anxious to leave to the Press a wide measure of liberty. They trusted the Press, and the Press with very few exceptions justified the trust. But further factors in the case may be explained. There was the Law in the background. The Defence of the Realm Act and the Regulations issued under it were very wide in their scope and not always easy to define. The penalties for any breach of them were severe. The procedure, which at first was by Court-martial in all cases, might be somewhat peremptory. The Press Bureau thus became a shield for the Press. It was no offence not to submit an article or an item of news to the Press Bureau, but to do so was a sure defence. It was obvious that no prosecution could succeed if the defendant were able to show that the publication had been sanctioned by the Official Press Bureau. Submission thus relieved an editor of responsibility. All this was a factor in the case, but another, and in many cases probably a more compelling, factor was the desire of the Press as a whole to "play the game." The Law, as I have said, was wide. It was not always easy, in the absence of immediate and direct access to official information and policy, to be sure whether a particular statement did or did not conflict with the national interest. Submission to the Press Bureau was a means of saving a

patriotic editor from mistakes which might otherwise be made in perfect good faith. *Per contra*, it might sometimes have the journalistic advantage of securing the publication of an item which *prima facie* might have seemed forbidden. Some editors may have been governed by one factor, others by another, or many by all of them in different measures. However this may be, in spite of the disadvantages which will appear in a later chapter, the voluntary censorship was very largely used. Some papers and agencies submitted almost everything, some submitted much, others little, and a few nothing. But speaking generally we may say that submission of war-matter other than political was the rule, and that the censorship of general matter, which was voluntary, became hardly less extensive than the censorship of telegrams, which was compulsory. And thus, when all the factors have been taken into account, another general answer may be suggested to the question posed above. That the Press Censorship worked at all was due to the genius of the British people for working a logically indefensible compromise.

How the Official Press Bureau was arranged so as to work this anomalous system is explained in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

THE ORGANISATION OF THE PRESS BUREAU

THE internal organisation of the Official Press Bureau corresponded in the main with its functions as described in the preceding chapter—that is to say, there was an Issuing Department, for the supply of what Mr. Churchill called “a steady stream of trustworthy information”; there was a Cable Department, for the exercise of the compulsory censorship; and there was a third Department for dealing with Press matter voluntarily submitted to the Bureau. The actual organisation in detail involved one cross division, however, for the Naval Branch of the Bureau was somewhat of an *imperium in imperio*. The Naval Censors were all appointed by, and responsible to, the Admiralty; they were posted to “H.M.S. President.” To correspond with this state of things, there was a fourth Department, known as the “Naval Room,” which dealt both with cables and with articles of a naval character. The Directorate had a general control over the various departments, and also special duties, which will presently

be described, in connection with the office of the Bureau as adviser to the Press.¹

(1)—*The Issuing Department.*

This department was primarily concerned, as will have been seen from Mr. Churchill's statement, with the issue to the Press of official news

¹ This essay is concerned with principles, rather than with persons or administrative details; but it may be convenient to put on record here the dates of appointment, etc., of the principal officers. The Bureau was opened in August, 1914, at 40, Charing Cross. The move to the Royal United Service Institution was made on September 17, and on the 30th of that month Sir Stanley Buckmaster succeeded Mr. F. E. Smith as Director. Sir Frank Swettenham, who had assisted Mr. F. E. Smith from the start, remained in a like capacity, and was presently joined, at the Director's request, by Sir Edward Cook. Sir Stanley Buckmaster held the post of Director till May 26, 1915, when he became Lord Chancellor. (The Press Bureau had thus the unusual lot of being directed by two men who became Lord Chancellor.) The new arrangements made thereon were announced by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons on June 9, in the following words:—"The management of the Press Bureau will be undertaken by Sir Edward Cook and Sir Frank Swettenham as Joint Directors. These two gentlemen have been rendering most valuable service in an honorary capacity as assistants to the previous Director. The Home Secretary will be responsible to the House for the Press Bureau." Mr. Frank Mitchell, originally a censor, and afterwards Secretary, was at the same time appointed Assistant Director, and later Mr. Francis Meade, also previously a censor, was appointed Secretary. These gentlemen continued to hold their several posts till the Office was closed. At the head of the Naval Censors was, first, Acting Commander Sir George Armstrong, Bt., and afterwards Captain the Hon. Sir Seymour Fortescue. At the head of the Military Censors was, first, Lt.-Col. H. F. Coleridge, D.S.O., and afterwards Col. Julian Leverson, C.B. The Chairmen in the Cable Room were during the greater part of the time Lt.-Col. J. Little, Lt.-Col. E. S. Wright and Mr. B. V. Melville, formerly M.P. for Stockport. Lt.-Col. Prowse, who had also been a chairman, had retired before the end from ill-health.

supplied by the Admiralty and the War Office. In connection with it was the Press Room (the theatre of the Royal United Service Institution). News might come in at any time of the night or day, and the eagerness of the Press to obtain it at the earliest possible moment was naturally great. Hence, and for other reasons which will presently appear, the principal London and provincial newspapers and the leading news agencies (metropolitan, Colonial, and American) kept representatives in constant attendance at the Bureau. The Press Room was surrounded with telephone boxes, communicating direct with the newspaper or agency offices, so that news might reach them with all possible speed. There was great competition, and the duty of the Official Press Bureau was, while doing everything possible to consult the convenience of the Press as a whole, to keep the ring, as it were, and to be absolutely impartial. When an important piece of news was known to be on its way, a preliminary notice was given in the Press Room, so that all the representatives might be equally on the alert. As soon as the necessary number of copies of a *communiqué* had been made, the telephone boxes were closed, and no use was allowed to be made of them until the distribution of copies was complete. The speed with which the newspapers produced the news on important occasions was sometimes astonishing, even to an old journalistic hand. On

Armistice Day we received the news from the Prime Minister's office a few minutes after 10 o'clock in the morning. The *communiqué* was issued to the Press at 10.20, and was in the papers half-an-hour before the guns went off at 11.

Work in the Press Room was not all excitement, however; in the earlier part of the war, indeed, it was largely confined to the tedium of "wait and see." Complaints were frequent in the Press and Parliament that Mr. Churchill's "steady stream" was sadly intermittent, even when it did not run altogether dry. This was partly due to the fact that there was often nothing to tell. The Commanders had little to say, and the official Eye-Witness, practised writer though he was, was sometimes gravelled for lack of matter. We at the Press Bureau did what we could to urge the regular issue of bulletins, and we had the satisfaction of suggesting successfully the issue of official photographs. During the greater part of the war the Bureau was responsible for the handling of naval, military, and aerial photographs, a heavy but welcome addition to its work on the issuing, and also on the censoring, side.

It was not only British *communiqués* that the Press Bureau issued. Arrangements were made for the speedy communication to us of all official bulletins issued by our several Allies, and enemy bulletins reached us by wireless. All these were

duly passed on to the Press. Files of all these documents have been deposited at the Home Office among the archives of the Bureau for the possible convenience of future historians.

Then, besides the daily *communiqués*, there were the gazettes and despatches, occasional summaries of military operations, accounts of naval enterprises, written up at or for the Admiralty, and when events were at all stirring a *communiqué* compiled in our office and circulated by the Post Office for Sunday news in remote places.

At the beginning the complaint was that the Press Bureau supplied the Press with too little "copy." Towards the end it became rather that we supplied too much. Mr. Churchill had spoken only of naval and military news, but Sir Stanley Buckmaster subsequently explained, with the Prime Minister's concurrence, that the Bureau was to be "the means by which *all* information relating to the war which *any* of the Departments of State think right to issue is communicated to the Press."¹ This rule was endorsed by Mr. Asquith's successor, and it was highly desirable. It preserved the censorship from some leakages, for one Department did not always know what another Department had good reason for desiring to be kept private. The rule also enabled the Bureau to act as a sort of clearing-house, and in various ways to consider the convenience of the Press,

¹ Statement in the House of Commons, November 26, 1914.

and therein to secure better publicity. Every Department thought its own communications of supreme interest and importance, and desired for them immediate and full publicity. Paper, however, was scarce ; there was competition for limited space, and a newspaper's sense of values did not always agree with that of the Departments. It was essential to adjust the supply of official matter, as far as possible, to the space likely to be available on a particular day.

That was one way in which we were able to help both the Press and the Departments. Another was that we arranged with the Departments to allow us, whenever it was possible, to have their matter some time in advance of the intended day of publication, and then to issue it confidentially to the Press. This plan conduced to national economy, as the country papers were able to receive their matter by post instead of by wire ; it placed some of the more distant papers on an equality with the nearer, and it enabled editors to prepare illustrations and to consider their comments. It is satisfactory to be able to record that cases in which confidence was abused, and an advantage snatched by using any part of the information in advance of the appointed day, were so few and unimportant as to be negligible. We could not wholly counter geographical distance, but we had one inflexible rule : any communication sent to us for publication must be put at the

disposal of the whole Press. "Then how is it," a Department sometimes said to us, "that our communication has hardly received any publicity at all?" The answer was that we had no power to compel publication, and that editors were free to use their own discretion. The communications issued by the Bureau are to be counted in tens of thousands, and not all of them saw the light¹; but on the whole the Press did all that it possibly could, and often more than from a strictly journalistic point of view might reasonably have been expected, to print everything that the Departments desired to impart to the public.

So much for the issuing departments of the Official Press Bureau. We now turn to those branches of the Office which were concerned with the Press Censorship.

(2)—*The Cable Room.*

The Bureau was charged with the duty, as already explained, of considering every telegram which was of a Press character—that is, which was addressed to or from a newspaper. No such message was allowed to reach a newspaper here or to leave this country unless it bore the stamp of the Bureau, signifying that it had passed the censorship. The principles on which the censor-

¹ A complete file of the communications, as issued, is also deposited among the archives of the Bureau.

ship was conducted are the subject of later chapters ; here we are concerned only to give a short account of the machinery.

The Cable Room dealt, then, with all inward and outward Press cables, as well as with all such cables in transit through this country from one foreign country to another. It dealt also with such Inland Press Telegrams as were deemed by the Post Office to be connected with the war. This last class was not numerous, as the Post Office exercised a very reasonable discretion. The telegrams in the other classes were very numerous, and it may be interesting to describe the history of inward and outward messages respectively. (Transit messages need not be dealt with separately, as they were in turn inward and outward.)

Every inward Press telegram was sent to the Bureau by the Central Telegraph Office and the various Cable Companies. A telegram so received was first logged in by the Postal Clerks in our Tube Room, and then sent up by tube to the Cable Room. There it met with such fate as it might, and unless it was wholly stopped (a rare occurrence) was tubed downstairs for delivery to the addressee. The anxiety of the principal newspapers and agencies to receive their messages at the earliest possible moment was a second reason why they kept representatives in attendance at the Bureau night and day. If the

addressee had no representative, a telegram was tubed back to the Post Office for delivery.

Outward Press messages might either be handed in to a Post Office or Cable Company (in both of which cases they were sent on to the Bureau), or they might be handed in at the Bureau itself by duly accredited Press representatives. This latter facility furnished yet a third reason for constant attendance of such representatives. An outward message after being logged in was, as in the case of inward messages, sent up to the Cable Room, and when there dealt with forwarded for dispatch.

The machinery was simple, but the pressure upon it was great. The inflexible rule was that every message, inward or outward, was to be dealt with by the Censors in the order of receipt. The Office was open for telegraph work night and day, and there were no Bank Holidays or Sunday closing. The work of the Cable Room was divided into three shifts of eight hours each. The number of telegrams dealt with during the four years, 1915-18 was 1,430,594. The largest daily total was on Armistice Day, 2,275. The largest weekly total (in October, 1918) was 10,562.¹ The average number of words per message was 144. It was found that each experienced censor dealt with about 110 messages

¹ These figures are exclusive of enemy wireless messages, which totalled some thousands.

during an 8-hour shift. The average time taken to deal with a message, from its receipt at the Bureau to its leaving for delivery or dispatch, was slightly under 25 minutes. These figures speak, I think, for themselves, and should be remembered by the reader of later chapters. The night work, the pressure, and the constant strain resulted in the breakdown of many of the Censors, who were necessarily not young men.

One of the diversions of the Cable Room, novel to those not already familiar with telegraphese, was to note the abbreviations which ingenious correspondents used to economise words. The Proclamation issued at the beginning of the war required all telegrams to be in plain language. The abbreviations were not always plain even to initiated Omniscience, but the Press Censorship soon accustomed itself to the practice and did not enforce the letter of the law. "Turgerms" puzzled us only for a moment: it was telegraphese shorthand for "the Turks with, or under, the Germans." "Smorning," for "this morning," and words like "unsoon" were obvious. "Unblackeagled" was a good essay in such sort, meaning "was deprived of the decoration": it was used to record the Kaiser's striking the English Princes from the Order of the Black Eagle. "Peterpauled" meant that a man had been consigned to the fortress of that name. A

message worded "What boat sam rush" might have puzzled a Naval Censor if it had not been remembered that the proceedings of Lt.-Gen. Sir Sam Hughes were exciting interest at the time, that he was about to return to Canada, and that "rush" is the usual intimation that a particular piece of news is deemed by the sender or the inquirer of special importance.

(3)—*The Military Room. The Voluntary Censorship.*

What was known in the Office and to the Press as the "Military Room"¹ was the branch of the Bureau which was concerned with all Press material (other than telegrams) which might be submitted for censorship, whether in the form of articles, photographs, or drawings. The work here grew in volume continuously until hostilities ceased.

After a time it became clear that the censorship, to be effective, should be applied to books as well as to newspapers—the Defence of the Realm Regulations applied equally to both—and in December, 1915, the Directors sent a letter to the Publishers' Association reminding them that the Bureau was open to consider from the point of view of the censorship any manuscripts that

¹ I do not treat separately of the "Naval Room," which, as already explained, was a combination for naval matter of the Cable Room and the Military Room.

might be submitted. Most of the more important publishers availed themselves largely, and I believe gladly, of this offer, and the number of books dealt with was over 1,000. A thousand may seem a small total compared with a million and a half in the case of cables, but several of the books contained many thousands of words, and some—dare I say it?—were proportionately tedious. In this branch of our work we received valuable help, of a voluntary kind, from Professor Oman. Officially we were only concerned with censorship, but there was nothing to prevent the offer of friendly advice, and several authors and publishers may have profited from the marginalia which the Professor supplied from his stores of knowledge of military history. We often wondered why some books had been sent to us—either because they were so palpably innocent of offence or because their publication would so obviously be undesirable or unprofitable. In such cases it sometimes appeared upon inquiry that the Bureau had been used as a publisher's reader.

The "leaflet" Regulation of November and December, 1917, brought fresh work and responsibility upon the "Military Room," which was reinforced for this special task by a Censor learned in the law. The number of leaflets read in the Office was about 1,000, and "leaflet" meant anything from a fly-leaf to a bulky pamphlet.

It would be tedious to enumerate other mis-

cellaneous work which was thrown upon us. The bulk of the work was the censorship of newspaper articles—more than 100,000 in all—and at times of a certain liveliness, whether on sea, on land, or in the air, the pressure was very great. Here again the rule was, First come, first served. After midnight the newspapers might be trusted not to trouble us, except on raid nights, but there was always one Military Censor on duty during the night in case of any sudden call.

(4)—*Instructions to the Press.*

There is one branch of the Bureau's machinery which still remains to be explained. The Official Press Bureau was an Issuing Department and a Censoring Department, but it was also an Advising Department. The Censorship, as we have seen, was largely on a voluntary basis, but the Defence of the Realm Regulations were peremptory. They were also, as we shall see more fully later, not always explicit. In view of the penalties to which the Press was liable, and of the harm which its indiscretion, in the absence of a generally compulsory censorship, might do to the national interests, it was desirable that there should be some means of conveying exhortation and advice to the Press. "From the very beginning," said the *Memorandum on the Official Press Bureau*, "it was necessary to issue instructions to the Press for their information and guidance." The issue of

these Instructions—some 700 in number—was not the least important and useful of the duties with which the Bureau was charged. In addition to the Instructions, we issued also from time to time, at the request of various Departments, Letters of Explanation or Advice.

All these documents were strictly private and confidential ; but the existence of them was mentioned in the public Memorandum just quoted, and their terms were occasionally disclosed in Parliament.

The Instructions, so called, were for the most part issued at the request of the Admiralty, the War Office, the Foreign Office, or one of the other great Departments, and a few were issued on the initiative of the Directors of the Bureau. From time to time, such of them as had not in the meanwhile been cancelled were collated into pamphlet form, and these Summaries were circulated to all the editors. They formed a Handbook for the Press in war-time, and were an important means of making the Censorship effective.

The Instructions consisted, for the most part, of hints and elucidations about matters which in general terms were covered by the Defence of the Realm Regulations. Such of them as were of this kind were rightly called "Instructions," and were often couched in more or less mandatory terms. They amounted to a reminder or a notification that such and such a disclosure would be a

breach of Regulation.¹ In themselves they had no binding force : they were only good in so far as they were in accord with a Regulation. If they were thus good, it might be assumed that disregard of them would aggravate an offence. In other instances, where the subject-matter was not clearly covered by a Regulation or even went beyond what was by law forbidden, the "Instructions" did not affect to be anything else than requests ; but Instructions of this latter kind were few, and the issue of them was not favoured by the Directors. For the most part, however, the Instructions, whether mandatory or dissuasive, were duly heeded by the Press, and were a valuable adjunct to the voluntary censorship.

¹ On this subject, see also, below, p. 135.

CHAPTER V

A DAY'S WORK IN THE DIRECTORS' ROOM

THE organisation of the Official Press Bureau and the scope of its work have been explained in the preceding chapter, but perhaps a little more actuality will be given to the account if I endeavour to describe a day's routine in the Directors' office. The description will in one sense be imaginary, for I shall not give one particular day's actual work. My memory would not serve for that, and if it did, the account would be less informing than one in which typical incidents are collected.

The day's work in the office of the Directors, the Assistant Director, and the Secretary began between ten and eleven in the morning. The correspondence and filing clerk had been at work earlier, and the Secretary when he arrived found the morning's letter-bag ready sorted for him. It was of a most miscellaneous character, but no reader will be surprised to hear that a constant ingredient in the bag was a sheaf of complaints. Why did a certain cable take such and such a time to reach its destination? To reply to such

inquiries, it was necessary to consult the log-sheets, on which exact records were kept. If it appeared *prima facie* that there had been any unusual delay in the Bureau itself, reference would be necessary to the log of the censors. But in the majority of cases the delay turned out to have occurred elsewhere, and the complainant had to receive the kind of answer so dear to the official mind, so unsatisfying to the recipient—"For further information apply to another department"—the Post Office or the Cable Company as the case might be. I observe, by the way, in the correspondence columns of *The Times* that complaints of cable delays by no means ceased with the closing of the Press Bureau. The fact is that neither the business world, the Press, nor the general public made sufficient allowance for the congestion which is caused by war conditions. Another daily batch of inquirers wanted to know why such and such a statement had been allowed to appear in such and such a paper, whereas etc., etc. The nature of such complaints, and of the usual kind of answer, is explained in the next chapter; but careful inquiry among the records was necessary before a proper answer could be sent. Then there were letters from those responsible for censorship elsewhere, requests for information or interviews from correspondents, and miscellaneous correspondence too numerous to be catalogued. One class of it, however, was so pathetic as to be

worth mentioning. The official photographs often contained portraits of groups of soldiers which might with difficulty be identifiable, or battle incidents which for military reasons were sent from the Front without precise indication of regiment, place, or date. Anxious or bereaved parents wrote to say that they thought they could identify their son who was last heard of in such and such a place at such and such a date. Could we give them full particulars? The War Office was helpful so far as it could be in enabling us to answer such inquiries, but I fear that inquiries generally resulted in negative replies. Another considerable batch of letters came from persons who confused the Official Press Bureau with a newspaper agency and favoured us with their contributions in prose or verse for immediate publication. A confusion of this kind was not confined to members of the general public. I remember one occasion on which an officer in one of the Departments rang up, asking to be told at the earliest moment the result of an important race. Until matters were explained, he was a little hot at the ineptitude of a Press Bureau which could not tell him the winners.

I must not delay longer over the morning's post-bag, for it was an exceptional day indeed when long before the Secretary had completed a preliminary sifting of the letters he was not interrupted by twenty calls upon the telephone. We

had lines on the general service, and direct lines with the Admiralty and the War Office. At the last stage we were also in direct communication with Paris, and we could also telephone direct to the proper Department at General Headquarters. As for the general lines, we declined to censor by telephone, for obvious reasons, but telephonic inquiries of a general character were incessant throughout the day and far into the night.

When the Bureau was closed and I was able to return to the country village from which I had been "dug out" four-and-a-half years before, a neighbour met me and suggested that now we might resume negotiations with the Post Office for giving us a telephone service. "Not just now," was my reply; "the holiday treat to which I am most looking forward is to be in a place where no telephone call can reach me."

When the Directors came into the office at eleven sharp, they usually found some difficult or doubtful telegrams to be considered. Some new point had arisen; or there was a border-line case, on which the opinion of the heads of the office was desirable. Most of the doubtful or difficult telegrams were passed, censored, or stopped, as the Directors themselves decided; but often it was necessary to refer a telegram or an article for the opinion of the Department to which the subject-matter pertained. Such reference was not made in order to shirk responsibility. The final responsibility

was ours, and we knew that we should have to bear it. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred we took the responsibility without consulting anybody, though of course specific requests from the Departments responsible for the fighting Services, and often from the Ministry of Munitions, were duly respected. But it was our duty to protect the interests of our country and its Allies, and we were not omniscient. We were not in all the secrets. There were wheels within wheels in many affairs. There were often statements put before us upon which a sound judgment was impossible without knowledge of facts and international conditions which we did not at the moment possess. Hence references to other departments, though made seldom relatively to the aggregate number of the submitted problems, were in themselves numerous. The War Office was naturally the principal referee, with the exception of the Admiralty. But there were very numerous matters which required reference to the Ministry of Munitions, and indeed there was probably no department which at one time or another was not asked for its advice. In sending on telegrams or articles to them, an early answer was requested—a petition which met with varying measures of compliance.

That morning was exceptionally fortunate if the work above described were finished without the intervention of other calls. An event of the

morning in stirring times was the receipt, or delay, of the *communiqué* from General Headquarters, so eagerly awaited by the public and its servant the Press. And many inquiries were made of us by other Departments. "Is Haig in?" How many times did the telephone transmit that anxious question! When did we expect it? Or, was it good news? If it had not come at the usual time, an inquiry at the War Office was made. Perhaps it was then beginning to come in, or perhaps the answer was that there were no signs of it and that the War Office itself had as yet received no information. In such cases there was the excitement of wondering whether the explanation was that there was nothing to report, or that movements of an important character were afoot. When the report came in, every effort was made to get it issued to the Press with the least possible delay. But one thing was even more important than speed, and that was accuracy. A place-name might come in obscurely written, and a hasty glance at the big scale maps was necessary. Or, very rarely, the message would not read, and reference to the War Office was essential for verification; or occasionally, before the *communiqué* had been issued, a correction or supplement would arrive, just in the nick of time, from the Front. The time that elapsed between the receipt of a *communiqué* and its issue to the Press varied of course with its length, for each message had to be

manifolded by the Roneo machine, not only for the supply of copies to the Press, but for delivery by our messengers to the various Departments of State.

In the afternoons the pressure of telegrams was sometimes less, and "there will be time perhaps to see what the newspapers are saying." But no! We are due at 3 to attend a Conference at the War Office or some other Department concerned with us. Or the Home Secretary desires to see one of the Directors. Or, here is the Director of Public Prosecutions looking in to ascertain if some offending publication had come before us, or if we had issued any warning on the subject. Or could we see our corresponding number at the War Office about some message referred to that Department? Or Colonel X. of the American Army would like to be initiated in the system of our Press Censorship. Or the representative of some Allied Power desired to consult the British Censors about facilities for correspondents of his country. The conferences or visits are over, and there are more telegrams or articles to be considered. We sit down to the task, when the telephone, or a special messenger, brings a call which brooks no delay. Such and such a movement or action is impending, and a suitable warning must be issued at once to the Press. This is done, or the issue is, after a discussion, agreed to be unnecessary or inexpedient. But

what of this communication which some other Department has just sent over for issue to the Press? It is read over and perhaps issued forthwith, or perhaps it is seen to contain matter which, as we know from other sources, should not be published. We must ring up and get the matter put right. But (as sometimes happened) the official responsible for the *communiqué* in question cannot be found. Then we must make the necessary correction ourselves. And here is a Censor from the Military Room who is in doubt about a few passages in a bulky book. We begin to consider the passages; and then comes another query: Is such and such a "leaflet" a pamphlet, or a book, and if the former, is it or is it not "intended to be used for propagandist purposes in relation to the present war," etc.? It is dinner-time before these problems are resolved. The two earlier joint Assistant Directors, and afterwards the two joint Directors, took it in turns to come back after dinner, and to stay at the office till midnight—together with the Assistant Director, or the Secretary, similarly on alternate nights. The after-dinner hours were often the busiest of all, as the rush of telegrams and articles was then greatest. In strenuous times one was glad enough, after a 13-hour day, when one was free to go home. There were periods when the pressure of work was much less than on such a day as I have been describing; but the hours were

uniformly long, and after more than four-and-a-half years of it, the closing of the Bureau was welcome indeed. The announcement of the happy release¹ was attended by many a parting kick from the Press, and we smiled when we read in one paper an insinuation that the Directors of the Bureau had, in the spirit and with the motives of the Tite Barnacles, been clinging to their posts. Incidentally, the suggestion was the very reverse of the truth.

¹ On the evening of April 2, 1919, the Press and the public were notified that "unless an emergency arises" the Official Press Bureau would be closed on April 30. Emergency did not arise, and the Office was closed at 10 p.m. on the appointed day.

CHAPTER VI

THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE CENSORSHIP

BEFORE proceeding to describe the principles on which the Censorship was conducted, I propose to devote a chapter to some account of its necessary difficulties and imperfections. The whole thing was, as has been said already, a compromise, and there are some anomalies in the system, or want of system, which have not yet been brought under review. Of the difficulties described in this chapter, some are inherent in the exercise of all censorship; some attach in particular to the censorship of a keen and highly developed Press; and others are peculiar to the anomalies of the censorship as it was exercised in this country.

(A)—*Difficulties Inherent in Censorship.*

In the next three chapters an endeavour is made to define the Principles of Censorship as we understood them at the Press Bureau, and to describe some of the more current fallacies on the subject. But when all is said, and if the wisest of mankind had laid down a complete code, it must

remain true that censorship is not and cannot be an exact science. The border-line cases are innumerable and cannot be foreseen. The exercise of censorship is an art, and must always depend largely upon individual judgement. There had been no school of censorship in this country. The staff at the Press Bureau was well picked, but few of the censors had any previous experience to guide them. And so novel were the conditions in the Great World War that previous experience may sometimes have been a blind guide. I may be asked what, as the result of the long experience at the Press Bureau, are in my opinion the qualifications for a good censor, and where are they most likely to be found. A high military authority has laid it down, I see, that all censors of military and general matters should be soldiers, and certainly in any staff engaged in censoring military matters there should be a considerable element of military experience. At the Press Bureau the Cable Censors and those who dealt with military and general matters were partly military and partly civilian. I do not think that the civilians, as such, were less efficient than the soldiers. The Admiralty, as said above, held that only sailors were competent to censor naval matter, and our Naval Room was manned exclusively by naval officers. I do not think that the work of the Cable and Military Censors was less efficient than that of the Naval Censors.

The Press was of opinion that journalists would make the best censors, and certainly in any staff engaged in censorship of the Press there should be a considerable element of journalistic experience. There was such an element at the Press Bureau and the experience was valuable, but I do not think that civilian censors without journalistic experience were less efficient than those with it. Among the indispensable qualities are exact care and a retentive memory ; but for the rest, the qualifications needed are, it seems to me, of a kind that attach to the individual rather than to the nature of his previous experience. They are common sense, sound judgement, and a certain *flair*. These are requisite, but if a staff were organised on which every man possessed them all in the highest degree, there would still be complaints of their work, because it is certain that they would not all form the same opinion upon doubtful points.

(B)—*Difficulties caused by Pressure.*

The special conditions of Press Censorship in our country increased the danger of inconsistent decisions. If time had not mattered, if there had been no urgency, it would have been possible to have instituted an elaborate system of check and counter-check, of revision and re-revision. Something was possible in this direction, and if the Confidential Reports, above mentioned, are ever

published, it will be seen how much care and trouble was taken in the devising of personal and mechanical aids towards a correct and consistent censorship. But limits were imposed by the conditions of Press production in this country and by the requirements of the correspondents of the Press elsewhere. The volume of work was very great, and the cry for celerity was very insistent. Furthermore, the work went on night and day. There was no off-time. Hence the staff of Censors had to work in successive shifts, and though here again many precautions were taken to insure continuity of policy, the risk of conflicting individual judgements was necessarily increased.

When all this is considered—the amount of material to be dealt with, the urgency of rapid work, and the necessity of working in shifts—who can wonder that mistakes were made? Most people will, I think, agree with the editor who wrote in answer to a querulous correspondent, “No doubt things are sometimes struck out which might have remained in and left in which might come out. But select the ten thousand ablest men in the Empire and make them censors, and you would still have to regret errors of the kind.”¹ You would indeed! for with ten thousand ablest men there would be ten thousand chances of conflicting opinions. There was perhaps more force in what another editor said. “Of course, if

¹ *Saturday Review*, February 10, 1917.

it were possible that everything submitted to the Press censorship passed before the eye of one extremely able and clear-headed man, there would be few stupidities and probably no grievances.”¹ I am not sure even of that : but at any rate the censorship was conducted by men, not supermen.

(C)—*The Anomalies of the Censorship.*

The anomalous system of the Censorship led to further difficulties. There were no persons above the scope of the censorship, and it was our duty sometimes to censor statements of importance made inadvertently by prominent Ministers. In each case the action of the Bureau was cordially approved by the Minister concerned, and in one of the cases an intimation from the Bureau that censorship had been exercised crossed a request that it should be. But though there were no privileged persons, there was a privileged place, and this exception was at times a serious drawback to the efficiency and consistency of the Censorship. At a very early stage it was laid down that the Press Bureau was not to censor any Parliamentary reports, and this rule had doubtless, on a balance of the various points involved, abundant justification. But the discretion of Private Members, and not less (I may add) of Ministers, was sometimes at fault. Defensive measures against air-raids were naturally a matter on which strict

¹ *Canada*, September 25, 1915.

ensorship was exercised. In connection with this subject, a Member asked an indiscreet question, and another Member interposed to inquire "whether it was in order to put down a question so worded that it could only be calculated to injure this country and give information to the enemy" (*Times*, November 1, 1917). "That is a matter," replied the Speaker, "for each Hon. Member to reconcile with his own conscience." In this particular case the question could be answered without any harm, but the conscience of Hon. Members was sometimes too elastic. The conscience or good sense of newspaper editors was often more strict, and we were asked for advice as to printing questions of which notice had already appeared on the Paper. If the matter seemed at all serious, we used to advise that it would be better to wait and see if the question were actually asked and answered. Means were often found within the House itself for the withdrawal of dangerous questions, and this was a matter upon which the Bureau was asked for advice.

From the point of view of military censorship the worst Parliamentary indiscretion was a speech in the House of Lords (*Times*, November 19, 1915) about Sir Charles Monro's report in favour of withdrawal from the Dardanelles. Lord Derby may well have "felt very strongly on the subject of public statements on matters which ought to be kept secret." "There is no doubt," he said,

“that statements are made in Parliament by responsible people which, if they appeared in the ordinary columns of the newspapers, would at once come under the ban of the Censor” (*Times*, November 26). The withdrawal was in the end carried out safely, and this indiscretion may perhaps be classed under Bismarck’s saying that the best way to deceive an enemy is sometimes to tell him the truth. The English, it may have been argued in enemy quarters, could not be such idiots as to publish to the world that they meant to withdraw unless the statement was false.

With some of the Ministerial indiscretions, this defence will not do, nor were the indiscretions confined to private members. I remember an occasion on which we received through the War Office an energetic complaint from the General Officer Commanding at a certain front. Three pieces of information of use to his enemy had, he said, been published. The explanation was that the information in question had been given by a Minister in Parliament. Again, the Bureau had been asked, and very properly, to keep secret the fact that certain Museums and Galleries in London were being used in part or in whole for military purposes. The reason was obvious : it was not desired to give the enemy such information, or a justification if he should hit any of the places in question. Nevertheless, a junior member of the Government, speaking in the

privileged House of Lords, said: "A further saving will be effected by the use of some parts of the museums and galleries to provide accommodation needed for Government Departments. . . . As a matter of fact the National Portrait Gallery already provides accommodation for the War Office for dealing with separation allowances, which accommodation would have had otherwise to be hired at heavy cost in the neighbourhood of Whitehall." (January 27, 1916.) By such indiscretions the efficiency of the censorship was impaired, and the newspapers were given a grievance against the Bureau which was frequent in minor matters. I have read scores of articles occasioned by such incidents, in which our "stupidity and idiocy" was held up to public scorn. We did not mind that, for the newspapers, which had been asked to keep the matters secret, had a real grievance, and it was natural that they should let off steam. The rôle of whipping-boy was cheerfully accepted, but we did chafe a little in such cases at the privilege of Parliament. A cartoon which *Punch* published (December 1, 1915) was much appreciated in our office. A Peer was shown saying to an M.P., as he pointed to a gagged War Correspondent, "Poor Devil. If he'd been one of us he could have said anything he liked." Mr. John Redmond at about this time (*Times*, November 24) referred to a speech in the House of Lords in which the

General Staff at the Front had been intemperately criticised, and he attacked "the Censor" roundly for "allowing it to be published."¹ Poor Censor! He never had the chance of interfering. The newspapers did not submit their Parliamentary reports to him; and if they had done so, the Censor could only have offered advice—which, if it had been in favour of suppression, would have been of little use unless all the newspapers had referred to him. Mr. Redmond considered the speech to which he referred to be a libel, and he went on to say that "If the Censor had not the courage to censor speeches of that kind made in Parliament, I think the Press of this country should have that courage, and the

¹ It used to amuse us to note how often critics of "The Censorship" made exceptions when it did not concern themselves. Thus, in the case of the Postal Censorship, with which the Bureau had nothing to do but about which we received many questions, men and women said to us over and over again that of course *some* censorship was necessary, but it was monstrous for *their* letters to be subjected to it. The magnates of the Press did not all or always object to the Commercial Censorship. "I am in entire agreement," wrote Lord Northcliffe, "with Lord Burnham about the desirability of restoring the freedom of the Press," but, he added, "the need for the strictest examination of all commercial cables was never greater."—*Times*, November 18, 1918. So, again, *The Times*, which did not approve of censorship of the newspapers, was in favour of the restraint of "liberty in pamphleteering" (November 29, 1917). Human nature does not change from age to age. Milton, for all his thunders in favour of "the liberty of unlicensed Printing," would call in the intervention of the executioner in the case of "mischievous and libellous books," and could not bring himself to contemplate the toleration of Popery and open superstition. And, as Professor Masson showed, the author of *Areopagitica*, at a later time, acted himself in the capacity of licenser.

Press of this country undertakes a great responsibility if it gives to members of the House of Lords or of the House of Commons reports of speeches containing libels of this kind." I do not know that criticism of the kind in question was so bad as it seemed to Mr. Redmond ; but I take this opportunity of testifying that sometimes when a Parliamentary statement was clearly contrary to the national interest on military grounds, the editors of important London papers informed us of their intention, sometimes by agreement amongst themselves, not to report it.

The worst of a Parliamentary indiscretion was that it was irremediable. A statement made by a single newspaper on its own responsibility might or might not reach the enemy, and the risk could be minimised by preventing its repetition in other papers, but a statement made in Parliament was sure to reach him, and if made by a Minister was presumably true.

The next of the difficulties, due to the large liberty which existed side by side with a censorship, was a source of unending dissatisfaction to the Press and of vexation to those responsible for the Press Bureau.

It used to be said of a famous headmaster that he was respected by the boys because "though Temple was a beast, he was a just beast." The discipline exercised by the Press Bureau was inevitably galling to the papers ; and although we

strove unceasingly to be impartial, we were denied by the very basis of our constitution from earning the appearance of being just beasts. "A grave inequality of treatment arises," wrote one of the papers, "from the absence of any compulsion to submit articles. Our own practice, and probably that of our contemporaries of highest standing, is to submit every article or piece of news that could conceivably be censored, leading articles alone excepted. If you are to have a Censorship, that appears to us the only patriotic way of treating it. But it is not a paying way. To send an article to the Press Bureau is to invite a severity of treatment which can be easily escaped by the simple process of not sending. Some of our contemporaries escape it in this way every day. One of them, for instance, has been etc., etc. . . . What has the Press Bureau to say to this as a piece of mischief-making between ourselves and our Allies? If the articles were sent to it, the blue pencil would act quickly enough; but if our contemporary is not patriotic enough to send them, the Press Bureau will let it say what it pleases. A policy of this sort simply puts a premium on a newspaper's not 'playing the game'; and the only marvel is—a marvel more creditable to the Press as a whole than the public realises—that the majority of them continue to play it." ¹

¹ *Daily Chronicle*, January 18, 1915, from an article headed "The Censor's Uneven Hand."

All this was perfectly true, subject to one qualification made below, and the inequality was the subject of innumerable complaints. In it the Press had a continuous and a galling grievance. In no business is the competitive spirit stronger than in that of journalism, and it was intensely irritating to a newspaper, which had submitted some piece of news and been advised not to print it, to find the same thing in a rival paper, which had not submitted. We were inundated with letters of such complaint, and the official explanation, that the rival paper had not submitted the item, must have given very cold comfort. One remark, however, may be made. The papers which maintained a constant practice of submitting everything gained something. They had not only the satisfaction, as the writer quoted above put it, of "playing the game," but they also played for safety. The risk of prosecution under the Defence of the Realm Regulations was not great, but it existed, and submission to the Press Bureau was, as has been pointed out before, an insurance against it.

Sometimes a newspaper, after receipt of the usual answer from us, would return to the charge with the question, Whether, now that the news had been published by a rival, it could not also be passed to him? Such a question raised many considerations, and each case was decided on its merits. If the unlicensed publication was in clear

breach of an express Regulation or confidential instruction, it was difficult for the Official Press Bureau to give it sanction. To do so would be to weaken the authority of the Censorship. Again, the publication might have been in a comparatively obscure paper, and it would be folly to give it wider range. Sometimes, on the other hand, the matter may have been of minor importance or a disputable case, and we decided to let our hands be forced by those who had published without consulting us.

Such considerations, though necessarily present to our minds, were, naturally enough, not always accepted as consolation by an editor who was smarting under a "beat" by a rival in the same journalistic area, and the grievance of inequality created by the voluntary basis of the Censorship was constant and abiding. It was felt at least as keenly by us as by our critics, and the subject was repeatedly under consideration by the higher authorities.

Four suggestions were at one time or another considered, and it seems well, in connection with the general subject of the Press in war-time, to mention them here. The first and most obvious suggestion was the radical remedy of making submission of all matter relating to the war compulsory. There were occasions upon which indiscretions in the Press had led to this suggestion being considered. It was not favoured by those

responsible for the conduct of the Press Bureau, to whom it was obvious that its adoption would have required the organisation of a huge staff of additional censors. It would, moreover, have been resented by the Press, with whose business it would have caused great interference, and it was an heroic remedy for an evil which was not great enough to justify it.

Another suggestion was often pressed upon us by aggrieved newspapers in the form of a logical proposition. The argument was this: "You have told me that I should not publish a certain article. Your justification for doing so must be that in your opinion the publication would contravene some Regulation under the Defence of the Realm Act. My rival has published it. Then why do you not prosecute him for his breach of the said Regulation?"¹ But, as has been ex-

¹ Here, from an article headed "A Need for Penalties," is a presentation of the case:—"Lord Curzon made a good defence of the Censorship yesterday in the House of Lords, and his case in regard to the *Globe* newspaper seems to us very difficult to answer, unless one is going to deny the need for any censorship at all. . . . But if the need for some censorship be admitted (and it is not difficult to show it to be an overwhelming need), then we must also admit the necessity for applying effective penalties and prohibitions to newspapers which flagrantly and repeatedly defy the Censor. The fault of the Government hitherto has not been, that it has punished one transgressor, but that it has let so many others go scot-free. What is the use of its stopping the *Globe's* mouth on Saturday, when yesterday it allowed the *Morning Post* to print in large type a letter from Mr. Joynson-Hicks, M.P., practically reaffirming what the *Globe* said about Lord Kitchener and accusing the Prime Minister and the Press Bureau of lying into the bargain?

"The vice of a Censorship, which is not compulsory and is not

plained (p. 27), the power of prosecution rested not with the Directors of the Press Bureau, nor, in the case of Press offences, with the naval or military authorities, but with the Director of Public Prosecutions. We could, of course, as any other citizen could, call the Director's attention to an apparent breach of a Regulation, and sometimes we did so. There must, however, have been many considerations which that official had to weigh. One was that though a case might in part be heard *in camera*, yet the nature of the charge and perhaps other particulars would have to be mentioned in public. Hence arose the anomaly that the more serious the indiscretion was, the

enforced by penalties against wrong-doers, is that in effect it is all the time punishing the innocent and giving the wrong-doers a bonus. One example will show how. On Friday night we submitted a news-article upon the Kitchener rumours to the Press Bureau. The Bureau forbade us to publish any of it, and our issue of Saturday contained no news-article on the subject. But the *Times*, the *Daily Mail*, and the *Morning Post* all published articles, portions of which corresponded to ours. We wrote to the Press Bureau to inquire why it allowed these papers to say what we were forbidden to say. Its reply, which we have, was that it had not 'allowed' it; the newspapers in question had not submitted their articles to it. No punishment whatever befalls them; the only people punished are ourselves and journals like us, which are loyal and submit to the Censorship. Now it is no exaggeration to say that cases of this kind are of daily occurrence. We do not, of course, write daily about them to the Press Bureau, but the fact is there. It is a constant and a very heavy handicap to all loyal newspapers. And such newspapers are surely entitled to claim, that if a Censorship exists, it should be enforced fairly upon all, and that the system of letting malefactors go totally unpunished (which in effect means enriching them and punishing the loyal papers) should definitely come to an end."—*Daily Chronicle*, November 9, 1915.

more reason there might be for letting it go unpunished. There were cases in which it was felt, on a balance of considerations, that the national interest would be better served by ignoring the publication of a piece of dangerous information than by emphasising it through a prosecution of the publisher.

Such cases were, however, few. The majority of cases in which complaint was made of inequality owing to the voluntary nature of the Censorship were not of a kind sufficiently grave to call for prosecution. Press offences were criminal offences. The Press as a whole was loyal to, and even forbearing with, the Censorship. Most of the publications in question were cases of inadvertence, and some of them were of importance more as a matter of journalistic competition than from the point of view of the national interest. We often explained all this to the complainants, but it did not always convince them. Least of all could it be expected to do so when the complaint was that an unauthorised publication had been made in defiance, or forgetfulness, of an express Instruction issued by the Official Press Bureau. To meet such cases, it was suggested that legal force should be given to any Instruction issued by a Secretary of State through the Bureau—that is, that any breach of an Instruction should *ipso facto* be an offence, unless it could be shown that the Instruction was *ultra vires*. Some such scheme

was, I suppose, in the mind of those newspapers which urged "the extension of the powers of the Censorship to include the enforcement of its orders under penalty for infringement."¹ This scheme would, however, have had the disadvantage of restricting the usefulness of the so-called Instructions, which were sometimes merely requests and yet were for the most part heeded. Its adoption was not felt to be demanded by the circumstances.

The practice was to restrict Press prosecutions to the lowest possible point, but this policy left the grievance of the submitting papers untouched. A fourth proposal was therefore discussed. It was suggested that to meet the case of publications made in one quarter but forbidden in another, but yet not serious enough to require criminal prosecution, the Press Bureau itself should be invested with some disciplinary power. The privilege of the *entrée* to the Bureau—a very important one since all *communiqués* were issued there—might have afforded an easy field for the exercise of such power. It might have been provided that any paper which after a first warning published undesirable matter should at the discretion of the Directors be debarred for such or such a period from the Bureau. No detailed scheme was proposed, for the suggestion in general terms, which had some strong backing in a section of the

¹ *Morning Post*, June 1, 1918.

Press,¹ was referred to the authorised organ of the opinion of the whole Press and by it was decisively rejected. The grievance was not denied, but it was felt that the Press would do better to bear the ills it had than fly to others it knew not of. So, things went on as they were, and we just had to recognise it as part of the day's job, to be accused of inequalities with which we had nothing to do and of indifference to Press grievances which the Press itself preferred to leave alone.

Such, then, was the organisation of the Official Press Bureau, and such were the difficulties which the Censorship had to encounter. Those difficulties are in themselves enough to explain much of the unpopularity and criticism which attended the work. But if angels from heaven had been in charge of it, there would still have been unpopularity and criticism, if only for the reason that the true principles of censorship in war-time were little understood by the public and because the points of view of the Censor and of the Press respectively are necessarily very different. These facts are fully discussed in the following chapters.

¹ Thus the *Yorkshire Post*, in a review of the work of the Press Bureau, said (April 4, 1919):—"Had the Press Bureau been empowered to act as a Court of First Instance, penalising offending newspapers, say, by withholding from them for a time the right to publish official news, which is legally copyright to the Government, there would have been little cause to complain of the operation of the Censorship—which, so far as we are aware, has never been exercised over the expression of opinion."

CHAPTER VII

PRINCIPLES AND LIMITS OF THE PRESS CENSORSHIP

THE most important, the most constant, and the most difficult part of the multifarious duties described in preceding chapters was the censorship of telegrams, articles,¹ and books. In this and the following chapters an attempt is made to define and explain the principles and the limits of the censorship thus exercised.

An energetic and genial representative of the Press said on a festive occasion that for four years he had seen much of the Censorship and had been seeking in vain to find the mind of the Censors.² I suggest that he may have failed to look in the right place. The mind of the Censorship was to be found in the Regulations under the Defence of the Realm Act. The text of the principal Regu-

¹ The reader should note that the word "article" is used here and elsewhere, not as meaning leading articles, which were seldom if ever submitted to censorship, but to denote all Press material (including photographs and sketches) other than telegrams.

² Speech by Sir George Riddell at a Press dinner, *Times* August 15, 1918.

lations affecting the Press has been given above. It will be seen, if these are collected and analysed, that the prohibitions were of two kinds. Some things were specifically and absolutely forbidden. And, secondly, there were Regulations of a general character, not specifically defined.

(A)—*Absolute and Specific Prohibitions.*

“No person shall without lawful authority collect, record, publish or communicate or attempt to elicit any information

(1) with respect to the movement, numbers, description, condition, or disposition of any of the forces, ships, or aircraft of His Majesty or of any of His Majesty’s allies; or

(2) with respect to the plans or conduct, or supposed plans or conduct, of any operations by any such forces, ships or aircraft; or

(3) with respect to the supply, description, condition, transport, or manufacture or storage, or place or intended place of manufacture or storage, of war material; or

(4) with respect to any works or measures undertaken for or connected with, or intended for the fortification or defence of any place. And

(5) no person shall without lawful authority publish or communicate any information relating to the passage of any ship along any part of the coast of the United Kingdom.

These prohibitions are absolute—that is to say, any publication of information under any of the five heads was, in the absence of lawful authority, *ipso facto* illegal. In proceedings taken for any alleged breach of these prohibitions, all that the Crown had to do was to prove that the publication came within the terms of the Regulation and was

made without lawful authority. It was not necessary to show that the publication of the prohibited information was in fact useful to the enemy, nor would it be a legal defence to show that the publication was not so useful.¹ Secondly, these prohibitions were specific. The terms of them were clear. Any one bringing reasonable care and intelligence to the matter could know exactly what was prohibited under each of the heads. The case was very different with the next class of prohibitions.

(B)—*Conditional and General Prohibitions.*

No person shall by word of mouth or in writing or in any newspaper, periodical, book, circular or other printed publication

(6) spread false reports or make false statements; or spread reports or make statements intended or likely

¹ This point was made clear by the then Solicitor-General (Sir Gordon Hewart) in his opening of the case against Colonel Repington and the editor of the *Morning Post* (February 16, 1918). "The Regulation begins by prohibiting expressly the publication of information upon any one of certain specified matters. . . . If a man takes upon himself the responsibility of printing information relating to the disposition of any of His Majesty's forces or any of the forces of His Majesty's Allies or with reference to the real or supposed plans of any of those forces he cannot be held to say that the information is not information that is calculated to be or might be directly or indirectly useful to the enemy. The question does not arise if the information is of that kind, nor is it needed to inquire as to the actual or probable result." The learned counsel had the more reason to remember, and make, the distinction because, before he was Solicitor-General, he had successfully defended *The Times* against proceedings taken under a different clause of the Regulations by showing to the satisfaction of the City magistrate that the information complained of was not in fact information to the enemy. (See the report of the case in *The Times*, June 7, 1915.)

- (7) to cause disaffection to His Majesty; or
- (8) to interfere with the success of His Majesty's forces or of the forces of any of His Majesty's Allies by land or sea¹; or
- (9) to prejudice His Majesty's relations with foreign Powers; or
- (10) to prejudice the recruiting of persons to serve in any of His Majesty's forces . . . or to prejudice the training, discipline or administration of any such force . . . ; or
- (11) to undermine public confidence in any bank or currency notes which are legal tender . . . or to prejudice the success of any measures taken or arrangements made by His Majesty's Government with a view to the prosecution of the war.
- (12) No person shall without lawful authority collect, record, publish or communicate, or attempt to elicit, any information . . . of such a nature as is calculated to be or might be directly or indirectly useful to the enemy.

Of these prohibitions, the first six (Nos. 6–11) were specific in subject, but, unlike those in the former category, they all involved questions of fact or opinion; so also did the last (No. 12), which, moreover, was general and not specific. Everybody could know without being told what is a movement of troops, or a military operation or a measure of defence; but who could say with certainty beforehand what piece of information might not indirectly be of use to the enemy? What is true and what false?—the question is never more uncertain than in war-time. What is likely to cause disaffection, or to interfere with success, or to prejudice a nation's foreign relations?

¹ The draftsman who inserted "aircraft" in Regulation 18 appears to have forgotten to make a similar insertion here.

All these questions admitted of differences of opinion, and a right answer to them often depended on inside information.

What, then, was the function of the Official Press Bureau with regard to this twofold code of law which it had to administer (so far as it had the power)? and what were the principles on which it acted?

If "lawful authority" had been always or even generally withheld in the case of telegrams and articles which broke the letter of the law in the case of the first set of prohibitions, and if the letter of the law had been widely stretched in the case of the second set, the contents of the newspapers would have been very different from what they actually were. But the action of the Censorship was in accordance with the general principles stated at the beginning of this essay. The Official Press Bureau was an agency for acting as watch-dog in essential matters, but at the same time for so relaxing or interpreting the letter of the law as to combine with necessary restriction the widest possible measure of freedom. No one is likely to deny that all the prohibitions set out above were necessary for the restraint, prevention, or punishment of possible offences. But at the same time everyone will admit that, unless common sense had been applied to the interpretation of them, they would have imposed great and unwise restraint upon the Press. It

was the endeavour of the Bureau, alike in the exercise of its censorship and in the issue of its Instructions, to combine with the defence of the national interests the supply of useful guidance and the maintenance, so far as those interests permitted, of the freedom of the Press.

All this will perhaps better be understood if we take the clauses of the Defence of the Realm Regulations in the order given above, and explain under each head the kind of Censorship that was exercised, and the relaxations that from time to time were permitted. The Absolute and Specific Prohibitions will be reviewed in the present chapter, and the others in the next.

(1) *Military¹ Movements, Numbers, Disposition, etc.*

The necessity of this prohibition, and for the most part of its strict observance, will be obvious to everyone. It forbade the communication of the kind of information which every enemy is anxious to obtain, and which if given must imperil the lives of troops and the success of operations. Only a born fool or a traitor would think of publishing such a statement as "Sir Douglas Haig has disposed such and such a number of troops, including such and such regiments in such and such a position." But it did

¹ The reader will kindly note that the term "military," here and often elsewhere, includes naval and aerial.

not always occur to rational and loyal men that the prohibition was essential also in the case of minor or less definite information. Even a magistrate held that it was only a technical offence to print a paragraph saying, "Watch this place"—the place being one where our troops presently attacked; and there was one application of the prohibition which was a cause of much and long-continued complaint and misunderstanding.

The fatal harm that might and I am afraid sometimes was done by the inadvertent publication of seemingly innocent information is admirably illustrated in a passage in Mr. W. J. Locke's interesting story called *The Red Planet*:—

Like all of us stay-at-homes, I cursed the censorship for leaving us so much in the dark. He laughed and cursed the censorship for the opposite reason.

"The damned fools—I beg your pardon, mother, but when a fool is too big a fool even for this world, he must be damned—the damned fools allow all sorts of things to be given away. They were nearly the death of us and were the death of half a dozen of my men."

And he told the story. In a deserted brewery behind the lines, the vats were fitted up as baths for men from the trenches, and the furnaces heated ovens in which horrible clothing was baked. This brewery had been immune from attack until an officially sanctioned newspaper article specified its exact position. A few days after the article appeared, in fact as soon as a copy of the paper reached Germany, a thunderstorm of shells broke on the brewery. . . . The German battery having got the exact range, were having a systematic, Teutonic afternoon's enjoyment. . . .

I do not know whether the novelist was here drawing entirely on his imagination or was writing up a story he had heard. But his story closely resembles, with some exaggeration, an actual case as it was reported to us, with this exception, that the newspaper article had not been submitted to the Press Bureau. I remember the case well, and as the matter in question occurred in a soldier's letter from the Front, the editor who published it may have been misled by the confusion, mentioned above (p. 35), between the field censorship and the censorship for publication. Soldiers—officers sometimes as well as men—mentioned in their letters home little particulars of places and dates which, if they should reach the enemy through publication in the Press, might have endangered the lives of men just in the way described by Mr. Locke. Of course *post hoc* is not necessarily *propter hoc*; but who, if he had ever considered what he was doing, would run the risk of causing the death of our men? It was a constant preoccupation at the Press Bureau to eliminate from telegrams, soldiers' letters, and articles any such tell-tale particulars as might expose sailors or soldiers of the King or his Allies to any possible danger, and if the censors sometimes erred from excess of care, it was an error that leaned to virtue's side. Better a thousand times that the censors should become the butt of captious criticism than that they should

imperil even one life by stretching a point in favour of publication.

The rule of censorship about military dispositions which caused the most constant grumbling and discontent, and the reason of which was least understood by the public, was that which had reference to what is called the Order of Battle—that is, the distribution of troops between the various fronts and the composition of brigades, divisions, corps and armies. The detailed rules under this head were very strict, and they covered a wide field. As the information which was prohibited by them would have been of great interest ; as the publication of it would, if military considerations had permitted, have had some obvious advantages ; and as, at the same time, the paramount nature of those considerations was little understood by the general public, the restrictions in question were resented more generally and strongly than perhaps any other “concealment by the Censorship.”

At an early stage of the war a well-known journalist formulated the complaint in a letter to *The Times* (November 25, 1914) headed “A Tale Half Told.” The complaint was that in a newspaper account of a certain wonderful bayonet charge no place or name of the unit was given :

Why should the name of this company of heroes be suppressed ? To the uninformed outside the gates of Printing House-square the answer seems obvious. Either the name has been struck out

by the Censor, or your correspondent, profiting by early experience, knew it would be, and so saved himself the trouble of writing it. However it be, the result is cruel injustice to gallant men, grave discouragement to others in the fighting line, and the ignoring of a splendid opportunity of inciting recruiting at home.

As the war went on, the restrictions of this sort were made more, rather than less, severe and comprehensive, and the criticism to which Sir Henry Lucy first gave expression became correspondingly more frequent and more bitter. No unit of His Majesty's forces was allowed to be mentioned except by the most general description, and no smaller subdivision of the unit was to be named. Where a unit was mentioned, neither the date of the event nor the locality in which it occurred was to be specified. From obituary notices, all references to the numbers of battalions and to the theatre of war were excluded. Similar information was deleted from various kinds of advertisements and appeals. The only exceptions were official statements and statements for which official sanction had been given. A word or two about such exceptions will be found on another page; but they were rarely made, and everyone will remember how tantalising it was to read in official *communiqués* about "North" or "West country" troops, and so forth, instead of being told the whole truth. All sorts of sinister motives for such concealment were suspected. Irish

Nationalists and Ulstermen, for once in agreement, thought, or at any rate said, that political prejudice was at the root of it. All sorts of pressure, sometimes from highly-placed personages, was brought to bear upon the Press Bureau in the hope of breaking through the cloud of war. None of these persons, I am sure, wanted to do harm, but they failed to realise the importance of concealment.

There is no information which a commander is more anxious to obtain about his enemy than that which relates to the precise disposition of the troops which are or may be opposed to him. He often sacrifices the lives of men in order to obtain it. Major Hesketh-Prichard, in his interesting "Memories of Sniping and Observation,"¹ has described how our men went daily in peril of their lives on daring errands in the hope of learning apparently minor facts relating to the enemy's Order of Battle. To obtain first-hand evidence about "the shoulder-strap of a single private soldier may," as he shows, "tell the High Command that a division has been moved." Yet there were people at home who thoughtlessly complained because the British Censorship would not give to the enemy free, gratis, and for nothing the kind of information about our dispositions, to obtain which about the enemy our men were daily and nightly risking their lives. Every Intelligence Department makes most elaborate

¹ In the *Cornhill Magazine*, July and August, 1919.

and ingenious arrangements for securing tell-tale facts and piecing them together. A commander's problems are infinitely simplified if he can only get sure knowledge of what there is on the other side of the hedge. It must always be a primary effort with every commander to conceal such information on his own side; and there were reasons which made concealment additionally important in the case of the British armies during the Great War. We were fighting on a dozen different fronts. Our armies were progressively recruited. There was no preliminary information accessible to the enemy from which he could surely estimate their numbers, quality, or disposition. The reader who weighs all these considerations should find no difficulty in understanding the great importance which was attached by our General Headquarters Staffs to withholding all information which directly or indirectly could enable the enemy to ascertain with certainty, and without paying any price for it, the disposition of Allied troops at the Front. The importance of reticence even in apparently small matters will be discussed again in a later chapter (p. 156), and the force of the considerations, presented there and here, would be still further weighted were I at liberty to refer to some measures which, as came to our knowledge, the enemy took from time to time in the hope of bettering his information.

The idea that the military or political authorities or the Official Press Bureau ever practised concealment in this matter from sheer perversity or love of mystification for its own sake is a delusion. The strictness of the censorship was increased or relaxed¹ in accordance with military conditions at the time, or (very rarely) when the superior military authorities held that other considerations were of greater weight than the immediate military situation. The greatest care was taken at the Press Bureau not to maintain censorship over any details of the Order of Battle which had been officially disclosed in communications from General Headquarters. This involved an elaborate system of filing and record, and I daresay that mistakes were occasionally made, but every effort was made to avoid them.

The classical instance of the overriding of immediate military considerations by other factors may be found in certain details which the American authorities sanctioned from time to time about their preparations and the coming of their armies. The American censorship, largely modelled on our own, was for the most part strict in all military matters, but there were some good Americans who thought

¹ Any historian, if he should be interested in this matter, will find the successive tightenings and loosening in the Confidential series of instructions issued to the Press by the Directors of the Official Press Bureau, a file of which is deposited in the archives of the Bureau.

that too much was being told under the guise of propaganda. I imagine, however, that it was held that publication would have a value in depressing the *moral* of the German home front greater than the purely military value of concealment.

So much for the principles of censorship exercised under the first of the statutory prohibitions. The safeguarding of it involved the exercise of much care and was subjected to much criticism, but the interpretation of the prohibition was comparatively simple. The case was different with the second prohibition.

(2) *Information about Plans or Supposed Plans of Operations.*

If this prohibition had been very rigidly enforced and lawful authority never given to any breach of its strict terms, no intelligent discussion of the military problems would have been possible. On the other hand, any general licence in the matter would have been in the highest degree dangerous. As it was, there was a great deal too much conversation about impending movements. Some newspaper writers had access to good information, and as the expert is under a natural temptation to use his knowledge, much harm might have been done if a careful control had not been exercised. Weighing all the considerations, the censorship in practice was a compromise. The rule was to forbid speculations as to prospective military

movements ; but exceptions were largely made and each article was considered on its merits at the Bureau, with or without reference to the War Office. Naval speculations were rather more strictly censored by the Admiralty. Military articles, if very vague or clearly wide of the mark, were not interfered with. If they seemed to come too near to actual or probable or even possible plans, they were censored. It was difficult to draw a line, and the experts, with one or two notable exceptions, were touchy gentlemen to deal with.

One of the oddest complaints which I remember to have read came from a learned professor who, in a lecture of which a report was submitted to censorship, had made certain predictions. The Censor had struck them out, and the professor complained in a later lecture that his predictions had not been allowed to appear in print. I do not remember the case, and cannot say what the predictions were about ; but what struck me as remarkable was the professor's next remark, as given in the report of his lecture.¹ "The statements, however," said he, "had since been justified by facts." He seems to have suggested that this subsequent justification by facts added to the enormity of the Censor's offence. As if it were not precisely the other way ! As if the object of censorship in war-time were not to prevent the

¹ "Professor Pollard on Censors," in *The Times*, March 2, 1917.

enemy so far as possible from means of forming correct anticipations! If forecasts were submitted to the Bureau which seemed in themselves reasonable and which yet were to the Censor's knowledge incorrect, there would have been rational ground for passing them; but this was tricky ground, and the rule was to discourage all speculation upon coming events. I remember one occasion upon which, at a time when important military movements were in contemplation, an able military writer called at the office, and it was suggested to him tentatively and unofficially that as his articles were doubtless read by the German Intelligence Division, it might not be a bad thing if he were to put them on a wrong scent and certain hints were given. "But," said he, "to commit myself to predictions which turned out to be wrong would be to do injury to my paper and to my reputation." The subject was dropped, but the incident stayed comfortably in our minds as illustrating the inevitable difference of standpoint between the Writers and the Censors.

It did not seem to me that the loudness of the complaint was always proportionate to the importance of the matter taken out; and I often used to think to myself of the reply which a famous editor gave to a querulous contributor. "Tell him politely," said Lord Morley, "that the world is not waiting for his views, that it would continue to move if they never appeared at all, and

that the end of the world would not come even if the paper itself were never to appear again.”

(3) *Information about War Material.*

The most important part of this prohibition was that which enabled the Censorship to eliminate all references to new engines of war, such as tanks ; various kinds of mortars, guns and bullets ; “mystery ships” and the like. The Regulation forbade the publication of information with respect to the description or manufacture of war material ; and these words, supplemented after a while by a clause authorising the Comptroller-General to prevent the publication of patents, sufficed to safeguard many an invention. The need for secrecy in such matters requires no argument, but it was not always recognised by enterprising editors, and one of the heaviest punishments imposed by the magistrates upon Press offenders was in respect of an indiscretion of this sort. I say “an indiscretion” for there was no suggestion of malicious purpose. Such indiscretions, and the desire of editors or their contributors to print such matter, brought home to us again the fundamental difference in point of view between the Censorship and the Press. At the same time, due weight should be given to a factor in the case which has already been stated. I have no doubt that many a submission of matter which was at once turned down was made, not because the submitter did not recognise

the matter as *prima facie* forbidden, but because he thought it possible that circumstances unknown to him might permit of publication. The more responsible papers loyally played the game, and I remember many cases in which an editor, receiving back as passed some matter which reasonably seemed to him very doubtful, referred to the Directors of the Bureau to make sure that an indiscretion had not occurred there.

A different kind of reason lay behind other applications of this general prohibition. The Regulation forbade any information "with respect to the manufacture or storage or place or intended place of manufacture or storage of war material." The definition made "war material" (Reg. 62) include "arms, ammunition, warlike stores and equipment, and everything required for it or in connection with the production thereof." The scope of these latter words was sometimes thought to be too wide, but it was justified by events—as, for instance, when in connection with aircraft production it became highly desirable to keep dark all information about supplies of flax.

The most difficult questions under this paragraph of the Regulation concerned "the place of storage or manufacture." The letter of the law forbade any mention of any such place. It was a technical breach of the law to mention Armstrong or Vickers. To say that they were turning out such and such war material in such and such quantities might

clearly be wrong, but the law forbade you to say that they were engaged in the work at all. Lawful authority stepped in to interpret the law by common sense, and the prohibition as to place was limited to the name or situation of any factory not previously well known to be devoted to the production of munitions of war. The reasons for keeping quiet about the situation and activities of new factories or of old factories converted to new uses were obvious, and the intensity of air-raids added weight to them. But there were many different points of view, and to steer a rational and consistent course between them was very difficult. I do not pretend that the impossible was attained. Here, as everywhere in the exercise of the Censorship, there was an element of compromise and, in consequence, of inconsistency. The point of view of the Propagandist gentlemen, for instance, often and necessarily conflicted with that of the censors or of other Departments with whose wishes we were in duty bound to comply as far as possible. It was thought desirable by the propagandists, and sometimes by officers of the Ministry of Munitions itself, to describe in glowing terms the manifold activities of this town or of that. I remember one case in which, without consulting us, the Ministry had put out such an account. By the next post we received a protest from the municipal authorities asking why we had sanctioned a publication which amounted to a direct invitation to the enemy

to visit the town in question on the next air-raid. Then there was the point of view of the enterprising manufacturer concerned for the future of British trade. On the other hand, there was a time when from a military point of view it was deemed of the first importance by the Air Ministry, and quite rightly, not to give the enemy any hints as to the numbers or types of engines or machines under construction. The complexities and implications of the matter were infinite, and few branches of the Censorship presented more perplexing questions.

The next paragraph of the Regulations was simpler, and the reason for it might have been thought too obvious for any attempt to evade it to be contemplated, but here also there was some difference in point of view.

(4) *Information about Defences.*

“No person shall without lawful authority collect, record, publish or communicate or attempt to elicit, any information with respect to any works or measures undertaken for or connected with or intended for the fortification or defence of any place.” Everyone can understand that enemy agents would desire to collect and communicate such information as this. It is less easy to understand the desire of entirely honest and patriotic persons to publish it. Yet such desire there was, where no suspicion whatever of any

sinister purpose existed. Nothing could illustrate more clearly than this the difference which may be made by the point of view. So far from any evil purpose being behind those who desired to have such information passed for publication, their arguments were of a patriotic character. Thus, if a place were thought to be inadequately defended, we were pressed to publish the facts on the ground that publicity would cause the defences to be improved. If, on the other hand, certain measures of defence were thought to be very good, we were told that it would reassure the local population to let the facts be printed in the Press. Such was one of the arguments pressed upon us in regard to the "Apron Screen" defence against aircraft.¹ In this case there was the further argument that some particulars of a like scheme of defence elsewhere had appeared in the foreign Press. To all such arguments the Censorship turned a deaf ear, and I hope that the reader will think that we were right. If he requires persuasion, I will ask him to consider what our responsibility would have been if anything had been disclosed which might have told the enemy of weak spots in our national defences or prevented effective measures of defence from having the desired effect. And for the rest, such reader

¹ A report in *The Times* of May 27, 1919, of proceedings before the Royal Commission on Awards to Inventors contains particulars of this invention. The report was headed "Raid Secret Revealed."

may be referred to the later chapter (IX) in which will be found an examination of the fallacies underlying some of the arguments above mentioned.

(5) *Information about Shipping.*

This was an additional clause issued in August, 1916, and the reason for it, in view of the seriousness of the submarine menace, is obvious. It extended to merchant shipping the protection of secrecy already given by the Regulation to ships in the service of His Majesty or His Majesty's Allies. The Naval Censorship was in all respects very strict, and the reasons for such stringency were better understood in naval than in military affairs. That is why most of the instances given in this essay are concerned with Military rather than Naval Censorship. But even in Naval affairs the fundamental difference in point of view between the enterprising journalist and the vigilant censor was often apparent. "What thrilling stories we were suppressing!" "How greatly the publication of them would hearten up the home front!" "What harm could be done by stories in form of fiction?" "Why was the public not told of the successes of our anti-submarine operations?" And so forth and so forth. Some of the Naval Correspondents did good service, however, by arguing the case for secrecy. "None know better," wrote one of

them,¹ "than the men of the Navy the danger of indiscretion and the value of the silence on which the service prides itself. An outstanding instance is the surprise of the monitors, and another is the success which attended Admiral Sturdee's expedition to avenge the 'Good Hope' and 'Monmouth.' A single hint about the latter squadron, a tiny indiscretion upon which the enemy could seize, might have made the whole plan 'gang agley.' But no one made any error, and von Spee fell a victim of British secrecy, as did the surprised Germans on Lake Tanganyika when our naval vessels suddenly appeared there without a word of warning. . . . A submarine war is in progress—a battle of wits as well as of material—and it behoves the public to do all it can to support the Navy in its policy of silence and secrecy.

"People are apt sometimes to get a little restless with so much going on that they do not know about and cannot understand. They see things as through a glass darkly, and this, to a democracy used to being told everything and with discussion free and unfettered, is something trying. But—as the naval men say in explanation of orders they do not see the reason for and must obey blindly—'there's a war on.' One of its lessons is that an absolute lack of publicity is necessary for the success of many plans, preparations, and methods."

¹ *Liverpool Post*, March 10, 1917.

The silence, enforced by the Censorship, with regard to the submarine warfare had, said Rear-Admiral Hall,¹ "a terrifying effect upon Germany, where they heard nothing of the disaster and death dealt out to their submarines." And as for the strict secrecy enforced in other matters, if any reader doubts the necessity for it, he should read the "Despatches from the Vice-Admiral, Dover Patrol, on Zeebrugge and Ostend Operations." There is every reason to believe that the enemy was entirely unaware of our intentions. But consider the variety and length of the preparations, and then estimate the harm that might have been done even by the smallest tell-tale indiscretions in the Press. The Press and the Press Bureau between them have reason to feel satisfaction that Naval secrets were well kept throughout the war.

¹ *Times*, May 28, 1919.

CHAPTER VIII

PRINCIPLES AND LIMITS OF THE PRESS CENSORSHIP (*continued*)

IN this Chapter we are concerned with the exercise of the Censorship in relation to those statutory prohibitions about which it might be matter of opinion whether a publication did or did not come within their terms (Nos. 6-11), and then in relation to a prohibition (No. 12) of wide and general scope.

(6) *False Reports or False Statements.*

The law forbade any person, by word of mouth or in any writing or in any newspaper, etc., to spread false reports or make false statements. Such an enactment is very necessary in war-time, when incalculable harm may be done by the spreading of dangerous falsehood. If, however, the strict letter of the law had been applied to the newspaper Press (with which alone we are here concerned),¹ if some official machinery had been

¹ Except so far as the Official Bureau had books and leaflets also before it.

charged with the duty of detecting and reporting every untrue statement, the thing would have been an intolerable absurdity, and the "Bureaucrats" would have been such as no man could number. The limit applied by common sense was to treat as breaches of the law such false statements only as were in the first place clearly and beyond the reach of disputation false, and secondly as were of real consequence. The Director of Public Prosecutions and the Attorney-General may have had in their minds another limitation, namely, that the demonstrable and serious falsehood was also wilful, but this is beyond my province. What is within my competence to say is that the law was in one conspicuous case put into motion, on the action of the Home Secretary and the competent military authority; that in some doubtful cases no legal action was taken; and that the Directors of the Press Bureau did not interpret the words as requiring them to pass nothing which they did not know to be true, or to stop everything which they thought to be untrue.

The conspicuous case in which the Regulation about false statements was enforced is that of the *Globe*. That newspaper had, on November 5, 1915, published the statement that Lord Kitchener had tendered his resignation as Secretary for War. The Official Press Bureau thereupon issued to the Press an announcement that "during Lord

Kitchener's temporary absence on public duty, the Prime Minister (Mr. Asquith) is carrying on the work at the War Office, and that there is no truth in the statement that Lord Kitchener has resigned." In spite of this denial, the *Globe* reasserted its story on the following day, and thereupon the police, acting under competent authority (Regulation 51), seized essential portions of the *Globe's* printing machinery, and the issue of the paper was suspended until, some days later, a suitable apology and withdrawal were made. The affair was debated in the House of Commons on November 11, and the Prime Minister said that the *Globe's* statement was calculated to do the greatest injury to this country in the eyes of the world.

Here, then, was a case of dangerously false statement repeated in the face of official denial. There were publications by other papers which seemed to imply false statements, and with regard to which I should have felt some little doubt if I had been responsible for putting the law in motion. Until the paper shortage caused contents bills to be withdrawn, we used to collect curious specimens in that sort. One that we greatly enjoyed was really humorous. It was put out by the *Evening News* at a time when *communiqués* were bald and infrequent, and it consisted of a blank sheet with the word "OFFICIAL" at the bottom. This is by the way. The posters which

are relevant to the immediate subject were sent to us by newspaper-readers in the country. One was issued by a Scottish paper, and contained in the biggest type the one word "INVASION." The other, issued in a northern town, conveyed the news "THROUGH THE DARDANELLES." Were these by implication such publication of false statements as ought to have entailed seizure or prosecution? The reader will form his own opinion. In fact no action was taken.

So far as the Official Press Bureau was immediately concerned, it never guaranteed the truth of statements submitted to it, though it often stopped submissions which it knew to be false if their publication would otherwise clearly have been mischievous. When the Press published news which afterwards turned out to be false, the blame was generally thrown, not upon the correspondent or agency which was responsible for misleading the papers, but upon the Official Press Bureau. I used to smile and say nothing, well knowing, as a journalist myself, that it is one of the treasured conventions of my calling to pretend that the Press can do no wrong. The matter is, however, worth some little discussion now, because it involves a point of fundamental interest about the scope of Censorship. A particular, and a somewhat doubtful, case will make the discussion more intelligible. In the middle of January, 1915, Reuter's Agency received a

telegram reporting a British success at La Bassée, and it presently appeared that the report was unfounded. The source of the message was the reputable Havas Agency. It had been passed by the French censors and appeared in the principal Paris papers. When the message came to the Press Bureau, what ought to have been done? Nothing was known to the censors one way or the other about the matter. The news was of an urgent character, from the point of view of the Press. From a military point of view there was no objection to its publication. The message was accordingly passed on to the Agency. When it turned out to be erroneous, the Press with one accord turned and rent the Press Bureau. We ought not to have passed the message, it was said, unless we had known it to be true. Now, as already cited, it is stated in the Defence of the Realm Regulations that "No person shall by word of mouth or in writing or in any newspaper, periodical, book, circular, or other printed publication spread false news or make false statements." And it might therefore be argued that the Official Press Bureau, as a guardian of the law, should not have passed any statement over which it had control without first ascertaining that it was not false. But to have acted on such a principle would have raised a storm in the Press, and justly so, for it would have been repugnant to common sense. The Press had been notified from the first

that the Censorship did not guarantee the truth of statements passed by it. It must be obvious that very little would have been passed at all, and that delays would have been intolerable, if we had always stopped to inquire and ascertain whether every statement in a telegram or a submitted article was true or not. Each case had to be judged on its merits, and the law above quoted was interpreted with reasonable latitude. It is true that the Press were sometimes not saved by the Press Bureau from being let down by their own agents, but they would have suffered far worse things if we had attempted the well-nigh impossible task of passing nothing which we could not guarantee to be true. There were cases in which, rightly or wrongly, it was decided, owing to the military or international importance of the news in question, to delay a telegram or an article for verification ; and then, if the verification was forthcoming, the complaint made by the Press was, of course, that we had wickedly delayed the news. The Press sought, as so many of us seek, to have things both ways—to be saved from making mistakes, and to suffer no delay from inquiry. All this was very human, and the corollary of the axiom that the Press can do no wrong was that the Official Press Bureau could never do right.

At a much later stage of the war there was a case similar to the report about La Bassée, though

here the complaint was rather against the Censors at General Headquarters than against the Censors in Whitehall. In a message from an authorised correspondent at the Front, the occupation of Lens was reported (September 3, 1918), and this report presently turned out to be erroneous. The Censors at the Front did not, any more than we in Whitehall, guarantee the accuracy of everything that they passed. The exercise of the censorship in relation to this matter of accuracy or inaccuracy was, it will be seen, very difficult ; but perhaps not much harm was done if all newspaper readers were as cautious as the countryman quoted above (p. 10).

(7) *Statements intended or likely to cause Disaffection to His Majesty.*

This paragraph did not much concern the Press Bureau. It gave us the power occasionally to censor telegrams to or from this country which came within its scope. For the rest, the newspapers which submitted articles to the Bureau were loyal to His Majesty. Statements were no doubt made from time to time in print which offended against the Regulation ; but if so, they were in papers which did not submit their matter. The decision whether to prosecute or not in such cases did not rest with the Bureau. The terms of the paragraph were capable of being widely stretched, but it was the established practice of

the Bureau, as already said, not to use the censorship for the purpose of interfering with political criticism. Occasionally matter came before us, in the form of speeches, pamphlets, circulars, or leaflets, upon which the paragraph had to be considered. In the course of an article on "The War and Liberty," Mr. Herbert Samuel, Home Secretary in succession to Sir John Simon, laid down the boundaries in the following terms.

"The advice of those who would have put down all political movements which could be regarded as unpatriotic was rejected. Prohibited were the communication of military information useful to the enemy, propaganda against voluntary recruiting, attempts to induce men liable to compulsory service in the Army to disobey the law, attempts to foment strikes or disaffection among the workmen in the munition factories or the shipyards. Not prohibited was the expression of the view that the war could have been avoided by better statesmanship or that it should be ended straightway by negotiation, or that conscription ought not to be adopted, or having been adopted ought to be repealed."¹

These definitions may be taken as describing the practice of the Press Bureau, both during

¹ The *New Statesman*, June 9, 1917. Mr. Samuel referred in a footnote to the debate in the House of Commons on June 1, 1916, and answers to questions on January 17 and May 3, 1916, when these lines of policy were stated on behalf of the Government.

Mr. Samuel's term of office as Home Secretary and, *mutatis mutandis*, before and after it.

- (8) *Statements intended or likely to interfere with the Success of His Majesty's Forces, etc.*

This clause need not detain us. Its main subject-matter is covered by the military prohibitions already discussed. Those prohibitions referred to information ; this one, to statements such as those propounded by defeatists with intention, or made in good faith, but still likely to interfere with the national efforts to secure victory.

- (9) *Statements intended or likely to prejudice His Majesty's Relations with Foreign Powers.*

Here we come to new and very difficult ground. For the first seventeen months of the war, the enforcement of this paragraph was within the daily purview of the Press Bureau ; and, as will readily be understood, its relation with the Foreign Office was during that period close. In the censoring of telegrams, and of articles which were submitted to us, we acted partly on hints given to us by the Foreign Office, and partly on what seemed the dictates of common sense. Some things were clear. During the period in question, the number of Neutrals was large and some of them were very important. It was desirable to avoid the publication of matter irritating

and provocative to such foreign Powers. It was well known to us that, in regard to discussions of matters affecting neutral countries and their attitude towards belligerents, German agents in the United States and on the Continent would exploit every injudicious word published in our Press. The more important part of the Press was very ready to take hints and accept censorship (often to the serious loss of "good copy"), which it knew to be inspired by a desire to further the policy of the Foreign Office, and there was no part of the censorship which brought us less complaint. Presently, however, it was decided by Sir Edward Grey and Lord Robert Cecil that a censorship of foreign affairs was no longer to be exercised. The Press and the public were notified by order of the Secretary of State that "Censorship by the Official Press Bureau on behalf of the Foreign Office would be suspended on and after December 20, 1915." The notice went on to say that this relaxation did not mean that there was any change in the provisions of the Defence of the Realm Act or in the Regulations made thereunder. The Foreign Office had, of course, no power of itself to annul the law. The Regulations, it was explained, "remained binding as heretofore, but the responsibility of seeing that they are complied with, as regards the publication in any newspaper or otherwise of matter relating

to foreign affairs, rests upon the publisher. As regards matter telegraphed abroad from this country, the responsibility rests with the senders of the telegrams."

This new order introduced a further element of anomaly into the censorship, and involved some fresh difficulties. The law made no distinction between different clauses of the Regulations. To publish statements "likely to prejudice His Majesty's relations with foreign Powers" was an offence equally with a publication in breach of any other part of the Regulations. The censorship—compulsory in the case of telegrams, voluntary in that of other matter—was established in order that offences should not come. If it was suspended in relation to one kind of offence, why should it be retained in relation to all others? The policy of the Foreign Office was not followed by any other Department. We were to continue the censorship in all other cases as heretofore. From all this, difficulties arose. How in practice were the terms, "censorship on behalf of the Foreign Office" and "foreign affairs," to be defined? The line of demarcation, in view of all the other terms of the Regulations, was often very uncertain. Matter often concerned the Foreign Office in one aspect and some other Department—as, for instance, the War Office or the India Office—in another aspect. We had to steer a course as best we could, and

sometimes editors complained that we had interfered with a telegram which ought to have been left alone as pure foreign affairs. I am glad to remember, however, that when a stopped telegram was shown to the addressee, the reasonableness of the Bureau's action was seldom questioned. On the other hand, from some submitters of matter we had an opposite complaint. What we had agreed with the Foreign Office to do, in the case of matter which seemed to us to deal with foreign affairs only, was to return the matter stamped "Foreign Affairs not censored. Responsibility for publication rests with the publisher." But this did not at all satisfy some publishers. "We ask for your advice," they said, "and what are you there for, if not to give it?" In such cases we were no longer allowed to refer to the Foreign Office; we gave such advice as we could on our own responsibility, or in case of serious doubt advised the submitter to apply to the Foreign Office himself.

In the correspondence of Queen Victoria with Lord Palmerston there is a Memorandum which may perhaps throw light upon the action of the Foreign Office in this matter. Lord Palmerston was Foreign Secretary and *The Times* was taking a line upon foreign affairs of which the Queen disapproved. "The Queen had often intended," she wrote, "to write to Lord Palmerston on the subject, and to ask him whether he would not be

acting in the spirit of public duty if he endeavoured, so far at least as might be in his power, to point out to the managers of *The Times* (which derives some of its power from the belief abroad that it represents more or less the feelings of the Government) how great the injury is which it inflicts upon the best interests of this country." Lord Palmerston declined the task suggested to him, and in the course of his reply said as follows :—

An erroneous notion prevails on the Continent as to English newspapers. The newspapers on the Continent are all more or less under a certain degree of control, and the most prominent among them are the organs of political parties, or of leading public men, and it is not unnatural that Governments and Parties on the Continent should think that English newspapers are published under similar conditions. But in this country all thriving newspapers are commercial undertakings, and are conducted on commercial principles, and none others are able long to maintain an existence. . . . As mankind take more pleasure in reading criticism and fault-finding than praise, because it is soothing to individual vanity and conceit to fancy that the reader has become wiser than those about whom he reads, so *The Times*, in order to maintain its circulation, criticises freely everybody and everything ; and especially events and persons and Governments abroad, because such strictures are less likely to make enemies at home than violent attacks upon parties and persons in this country. Foreign Governments and Parties ought therefore to look upon English newspapers in the true point of view, and not to be too sensitive as to attacks which those papers may contain. Foreign Governments do understand the true state of the case ; but their subjects do not, and until their own Press is wholly free, they can scarcely be expected to do so. England, accustomed to her free Press, is

not sensitive to the abuse of the Press of other countries. In this very year, 1861, she endured that of the American Press, virulent as it was, with entire equanimity.¹

Some of Lord Palmerston's shrewd remarks are out of date, and readers of to-day will smile at the idea that *The Times* shrinks from "violent attacks upon parties and persons in this country"; but Lord Palmerston's main point is not inapplicable to the conditions of the censorship in our own time. The maintenance of censorship in regard to foreign affairs may have seemed undesirable as tending to foster abroad an idea that the English Press was more under the guidance of official leading strings than in fact it was. It was in leading articles that statements possibly likely to prejudice His Majesty's relations with foreign Powers would most commonly appear, and such articles were seldom, if ever, subject to any censorship. The possible prejudice would be greater if they were supposed to have passed an official censorship, and less if they were known not to have done so. Lord Palmerston's argument may very possibly have actuated his successors in 1915.

However this may have been, censorship in relation to foreign affairs was suspended as from December 20, 1915, and was never resumed. The relaxation was even extended after the Armistice, when in relation to discussions about the

¹ "Queen Victoria's Letters," III, p. 590, and Martin's "Life of the Prince Consort," V, p. 400.

Paris Conference—discussions which could hardly be regarded as affecting only foreign affairs and which were capable of making considerable mischief—the Government instructed the Official Press Bureau to exercise no censorship at all. I have dwelt at some length on this aspect of the Censorship for two reasons. One is that, after the date named, we received complaints from responsible persons at home and abroad about the appearance of telegrams for which, as I have explained, we no longer had any right of interference. The other and more important reason is that the suspension of foreign affairs censorship illustrates in a conspicuous manner one of the main propositions which I think that this essay will establish. The Press Censorship was full of anomalies in principle, and therefore of peculiar difficulties in practice. But these were the price which had to be paid for the preservation, so far as essential war conditions permitted, of the freedom of the British Press, and especially of its right of free criticism.

The next two paragraphs of the Regulations will permit of more summary treatment.

(10) *Statements intended or likely to prejudice Recruiting or Discipline.*

So far as this paragraph referred to recruiting, it came very little within the purview of the Press Bureau. The newspapers which submitted matter

were keen not to prejudice but to help recruiting. If there were a few prints otherwise minded, they did not as a rule submit to the censorship, and with regard to such the Directors of the Official Press Bureau had no responsibility other than might belong to every good citizen. When any doubtful matter was submitted, the principles applied were as stated in the words of Mr. Samuel quoted above (p. 118).

The terms, "intended or likely to prejudice the training, discipline, or administration" of His Majesty's forces, covered a wide ground and were the sanction behind a great deal of miscellaneous military and naval censorship. "Training" may be dismissed with a reference to the special Regulation cited below. The term "administration" might have been stretched to prevent legitimate and wholesome criticism. I hope, and believe, that it was not. Doubtful cases sometimes were before us; and then we usually referred to the competent authority with an expression of our intention to pass the statement unless we were informed that it was both untrue and mischievous.

Discipline is one of the main elements of military success, and here the censorship was more strict. I do not think that any of the papers with which we had to do wanted to publish any statement obnoxious to this part of the Regulations, but it covered some matters in which the reason

for censorship was not *prima facie* apparent, and in which newspaper writers sometimes overlooked the necessity for restraint.

For instance, a newspaper writer is by the nature of his business an interviewer, and an interviewer is an advertiser. But the traditions, the interests, the good feeling, and the discipline of the fighting Services are all opposed to the wiles of the interviewer and the mention by name of particular officers or men, until the recommendation for recognition has been made by the Commander approved by the War Council, could only lead to trouble.

(11) *Financial Prohibitions.*

This sub-section (Reg. 27d) was of very little concern to the Press Censorship. Here, again, the Press as a whole were zealous not to prejudice but to promote "the success of financial measures taken with a view to the prosecution of the war." There were, however, from time to time occasions for putting the Press on their guard, and for watching inward cables carefully.

We now come to a paragraph of Regulation 18 (see p. 90) which I have taken out of its order and reserved for discussion last and separately. The reason for such treatment will at once be apparent upon a consideration of its terms.

(12) "*No person shall without lawful authority collect, record, publish or communicate, or attempt to elicit, any information . . . of such a nature as is*

calculated to be or might be directly or indirectly useful to the enemy."

This, it will be seen, was a kind of omnibus clause. The preceding paragraphs of Regulation 18 detailed specifically various kinds of information which were prohibited. Regulation 27 similarly detailed the subject-matter of various kinds of prohibited statements. This clause was designed to catch up any kind of information to the enemy which could not be specified in detail, or which in fact might not have been foreseen. It was therefore necessarily indeterminate, and the Press were assisted by a large number of the "Instructions" mentioned above. Put into colloquial form, what they said was this: "It may not occur to you that such and such a piece of information might be useful to the enemy. Please therefore be on the look out, and if you are in doubt refer to the Official Press Bureau. Such and such a competent authority attaches great importance to secrecy being observed about such and such a subject." The wisdom of the omnibus prohibition, the need for special Instructions *ad hoc*, were speedily illustrated by the course of the war. In describing the practice of the Censorship under this head, I shall group my examples in two categories, (a) Air-raids, and (b) Miscellaneous.

(a) Air-raids.

It is a curious instance of the small attention which aerial warfare attracted at the start that the

Defence of the Realm Act and Regulations as first issued contained no reference to it. They concerned themselves with safeguarding His Majesty's forces "by land or sea" only. And even when the air was remembered and provided for in one clause, it was forgotten in another. Happily, the Acts and the Regulations contained an omnibus clause from the first, and thus the censorship of matter dealing with air-raids had legal sanction behind it. Few branches of the Censorship were more criticised, and about few were the true principles of military caution so ill understood.

There were three stages in the Censorship with regard to air-raids. At first no special precautions were taken. The Press was left free to censor itself, if it chose.¹ This period was short. "Copy" about raids was especially good from a newspaper point of view, and it was found that papers, especially in the raided areas, published a great deal of information likely to be useful to the enemy. The raiders had definite objectives, but they might not know, and often could not know, unless they were told, how far they had succeeded in reaching them. Enterprising newspapers told. Even charts were published of the actual route taken. This was clearly

¹ This remark does not apply, of course, to telegrams. The successive phases of the Censorship may be traced in the file of Instructions to the Press.

intolerable. It was thereupon decided to prohibit the publication of any matter about air-raids other than the official *communiqués*, and as such total suppression of the facts was very unpopular, and, moreover, was open to misconstruction, an official correspondent was sent round to describe such details as might without indiscretion be published. This plan in its turn was abandoned as curbing too much the enterprise of the newspapers, and the matter ended in a compromise. The Press were told that nothing was to be published until an official *communiqué* had been issued. The newspapers were to be free to write up the raids in their own way, but they were requested to submit their reports to censorship, and at the same time a detailed code of "Don'ts" was drawn up for the guidance of the Press and of the censors. The Press made the most of this liberty.

In one of the minor Press polemics of the war much sarcastic play was made with the phrase "darkness and composure" in which one of the editors had summed up the proper way of meeting the enemy's raids. It must be admitted that counter-aircraft and bullets were a better way, or at any rate that the one method should be supplemented, as it presently was, by the other. But so far as meeting the raids in the Press was concerned, the much derided phrase may be applied as a good summary of what was wanted.

“Composure”: that is to say, Do not exaggerate or pile up the agony unnecessarily, and preserve a sense of proportion. The men at the Front, with whom enemy raids were a nightly occurrence and who were habituated to tragedy on a larger scale, were often surprised and sometimes indignant at the comparative importance apparently attached by the Press, as judged by “lineage,” to the battles at the Front and to raids at home respectively. They forgot that military men, or correspondents working under their eye, were responsible for the one set of reports and journalists at home for the other. And with regard to the latter, it may be recalled that a famous French editor is said to have placed in the newsroom of his office this notice: “Remember that one man run over on the Boulevards is worth more to us than a thousand buried in a distant earthquake.” The Press during the war was not callous, but it was following a natural bent in writing up tragic matter which occurred at its doors. The Directors of the Press Bureau cannot, therefore, claim much success in the advice which they offered from time to time in this connection under the head of what I have called “Composure,” meaning a sense of proportion. The amount of raid-matter submitted for censorship was very great, and a raid night was a harassing occasion for everybody concerned, alike at the Press Bureau and in the newspaper offices. The papers flooded

us with copy, and the call for speed in dealing with it was urgent. On such occasions we employed additional censors, but owing to the limits of human endurance the work had to be done in shifts. Moreover, the treatment of copy submitted varied in accordance with successive instalments of information issued by the responsible naval or military authorities. It was inevitable that some apparent inequalities and some real mistakes should be made ; but to those who know the conditions under which the work was necessarily done, the wonder will rather seem that it was done with so little friction or cause of reasonable complaint. These remarks are made by the way, and in justice to a much abused but highly efficient staff. I now pass to another branch of the main argument.

“Darkness”: this was a counsel of prudence, no less in the sphere of censorship than in our streets and factories. I cannot do better in this connection than cite the justification of British reticence which Mr. Balfour gave in a letter to a correspondent which was published in the Press on August 30, 1915 :—

You ask me why the accounts published in this country of enemy air raids are so meagre, while the German narratives of the same events are rich in lurid detail. You point out that while these narratives are widely believed in neutral countries, the reticence of the censored British Press suggests a suspicion that unpleasant truths are being deliberately hid from a nervous public.

Compare the following accounts, which, though the historian would never guess it, relate to the same airship raid :—

TRANSLATION.

Headlines of *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, August 11, 1915.

AIR ATTACK ON THE DOCKS OF LONDON.

On the night of the 9th—10th of August our Naval Airships carried out attacks upon fortified coast towns and harbours on the East Coast of England.

In spite of strenuous opposition, bombs were dropped on British warships in the Thames, on the docks of London, on the torpedo craft base at Harwich, and on important positions on the Humber.

Good results were observed.

The airships returned safely from their successful undertaking.

August 10, 1915.

The Secretary of the Admiralty makes the following announcement :—

A squadron of hostile airships visited the East Coast last night and this morning between the hours of 8.30 p.m. and 12.30 a.m.

Some fires were caused by the dropping of incendiary bombs, but these were quickly extinguished and only immaterial damage was done.

The following casualties have been reported :—1 man, 8 women, and 4 children killed; 4 men, 6 women, and 2 children wounded.

One Zeppelin was seriously damaged by gunfire of the land defences, and was reported this morning being towed into Ostend. She has since been subjected to continual attacks by aircraft from Dunkirk under heavy fire, and it is now reported that after having had her back broken and rear compartments damaged she was completely destroyed by explosion.

Now it is plain that if one of these stories is true the other is false. Why not then explain the discrepancy and tell the world in detail wherein the German account distorts the facts ?

The reason is quite simple. Zeppelins attack under cover of night, and (by preference) of moonless night. In such conditions landmarks are elusive and navigation difficult. Errors are inevitable, and sometimes of surprising magnitude. The Germans constantly assert, and may sometimes believe, that they have dropped bombs on places which in fact they never approached. Why make their future voyages easier by telling them where they have blundered in the past ? Since their errors are our gain, why dissipate them ? Let us learn what we can from the enemy ; let us teach him only what we must.

“ Let us teach the enemy only what we must ”: this was the sound principle on which the censorship of air-raid matter was exercised. We were often asked—not so much by the newspapers as by members of the public—What was the use of concealing facts about raids which were known to everyone on the spot? As if the object of the Censorship were to keep people at home in the dark! But this is a popular fallacy which will be noticed in the next chapter. The reasons for keeping the enemy in the dark will become clear upon a little consideration. In France and elsewhere so great importance was attached to locating the exact effect of artillery fire that our aircraft were daily incurring terrible risks in order to observe it. In this country the enemy aircraft attacked, and it was the British Press that might inadvertently act as the enemy’s observer. An aviator flying at a height of over 10,000 feet under heavy gunfire must always be in doubt as to his whereabouts, and the German *communiqués* concerning raids contained, as Mr. Balfour noted, so many inaccuracies as to show that the raiders were often unable to recognise with any certainty the towns raided. An airman probably knew whether he was over London, but he did not know accurately where his bombs were dropped. Suppose that an enemy who had been aiming at the warehouse district in the centre of London learnt from his Intelligence Section, through a

careful perusal of the British Press, that his bombs fell two or three miles to the north, such information would obviously have been of great value to him. It was the constant care of the Official Press Bureau to eliminate all such tell-tale scraps of information from the voluminous accounts of air-raids submitted by the Press. So, again, particulars as to the damage caused by individual bombs were eliminated. If the enemy learnt that a 50-kilo. bomb was dropped on a house and exploded on the top floor without killing anybody on the ground floor, he might have seen the advisability of fitting a delay-action fuse in order to cause greater damage and loss of life next time. It sometimes seemed to a reporter harmless to note that such or such a bomb failed to explode. He forgot that by so doing he might be warning the enemy to find the cause and remedy it. In these and many other details which it would be tedious to notice, the practice of the Censorship was to keep the enemy in the dark, and to teach him only what we must.

(b) Miscellaneous matters the publication of which was "of such a nature as is calculated to be or might be directly or indirectly useful to the enemy."

It was sometimes complained that the Instructions issued by the Directors of the Official Press Bureau were too many. Numerous they certainly were. The grand total was just over 700, though

a large number of them were only cancellations of temporary instructions. Our principal enemy, it may be interesting to record, was in this respect more voluminous. It appeared from a debate in the Reichstag reported in January 1916 that even then the number of orders issued by the German Censorship was 1,013. What the total was by the end of the war I cannot say, but it is safe to assume that it was at least double our number, for at the corresponding date in 1916 our Instructions were well under 400. These figures may serve to indicate the wide range of matters covered by the omnibus prohibition now under review.

As the war progressed, the struggle between nations was constantly touching new ground, and the enterprise of the Press brought to light from time to time new fields in which a warning was desirable lest information of value to the enemy might inadvertently be conveyed. I shall not attempt to treat this branch of my subject exhaustively; one or two instances under each of the heads just noted will suffice as illustrations.

The war became in some measure one of national endurance, and at times there were particulars about the food supply which it was desirable not to disclose. So, again, there were details about the supply and prices of ores and metals which one Department or another had good reason for desiring to keep private.

Under the other head there were many sub-

jects which the Press desired to write up, which might not *prima facie* seem objectionable, which did not contravene any specific Regulation, but which nevertheless might directly or indirectly convey information of use to the enemy. For instance, few stories of the war were more thrilling than those which gave accounts of the escape of prisoners; and when once the escape had been safely made, a prisoner, or reporters to whom he talked, saw no reason for suppressing details of how it was done. The point of view of our Censorship was necessarily different. Such reports were closely censored lest they should give the enemy any hints which might lead to greater vigilance in the future. So, again, it was of great importance, though the reason was not always obvious to those whose matter we censored, not to disclose to the enemy any secret source of information used by any of the Allies.

Without going into detail, I think enough has been said to show the wisdom of the omnibus prohibition, as I have called it, and to illustrate the spirit in which the prohibition was interpreted by the Censorship.

We shall pass in the next chapter to some more general principles of the art of Censorship.

CHAPTER IX

PRINCIPLES OF CENSORSHIP ILLUSTRATED BY SOME CURRENT FALLACIES

THE preceding chapter has described the principles on which the Press Bureau acted in regard to the several prohibitions laid down under the Defence of the Realm Act. It remains to discuss certain principles of censorship which are applicable generally to all cases. These may best be drawn out by an examination of the corresponding fallacies which lay at the root of the criticisms and complaints to which the Censorship was most commonly subjected.

When these criticisms are closely analysed, it will be found that two governing misconceptions are involved in them. I do not suppose that every critic had thought the matter out and consciously approved of the notions which will presently be examined. The protests against the Censorship were no doubt in large measure instinctive. The whole idea of censorship is repugnant to a democracy accustomed to a completely free Press. The war was one in which to a degree un-

equalled before the whole nation was involved. Its burdens and its sufferings came home to every family in the land. The eagerness for news was thus intense and widespread. Consequently there was a natural resentment at all restriction of news. The ground was thus favourable for the spread of a notion which a section of the Press, it must be admitted, did everything in its power to foster—the notion that the policy of restriction was due to obstinate obscurantism, and its practice to wilful folly. Such was the source of the first governing fallacy, which may be defined as a belief that the censorship was designed and conducted in order to keep the public at home in the dark.

The second fallacy was different. There were, of course, many people, indeed they were probably a majority, who fully admitted the necessity of a rigorous censorship within certain limits. I do not suppose that anyone, if seriously tackled on the subject, would have denied the necessity of some censorship. But there was a predisposition in many minds—a predisposition natural especially to the journalistic mind—to draw the limits very narrowly. This inclination found expression in many different ways and in many different connections; but underlying all or most of such expressions one governing fallacy may be traced. It was that in every doubtful case the presumption should have been in favour of publication.

These two propositions will now be examined

in turn, and the fallacy of them illustrated by examples.

(A).—*That the purpose and practice of the Censorship was to conceal truth from the public at home.*

Of this suggestion two typical examples may be cited—one from a popular newspaper, the other from the report of a speech by a University Professor. “When,” asked the *Daily Mail*, (July 11, 1918), “will the Censorship learn that this war belongs to the British people and not to the haughty Whitehall Press Bureau?” And in similar strain Professor Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, speaking at Cambridge on “the disastrous Press censorship,” claimed “the right of the nation to know the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about the war. It was the whole people of Great Britain who accepted the war and who were paying the price—the nation and not a few thousand Ministers, Ministers’ secretaries, and secretaries’ clerks.”¹

“Paying the price.” That was precisely the consideration that was never absent from a good censor’s mind. For any piece of information directly or indirectly useful to the enemy which might be given to him through the Press, the price would have to be paid by some of those to whom this war belonged. Half the grumblings about concealment by haughty Mandarins was

¹ *The Times*, May 28, 1918.

due to the fact that the preconceived notion, described above, blinded the grumblers to the indirect usefulness to the enemy of information which to a careless mind might seem innocuous. The crudest form assumed by the fallacy was in a question which was addressed to us over and over again and in connection with a great variety of matters, sometimes in anonymous missives, but more often by presumably responsible persons. What in the world is the use, it was asked, of suppressing the publication of reports about such and such an air-raid or such and such an explosion or such and such a movement of a ship or a ferry-boat, when "everyone in this neighbourhood knows all about it from personal observation"?¹ We must have written hundreds of letters pointing out the elementary fact that the object of naval, military, and aerial censorship was not to conceal things from our own people, but from the enemy. The persistence with which the question was asked shows how deep-seated was the prepossession described above.

In some cases the fallacy had more specious covering. At the urgent instance of the naval and flying authorities the Press Bureau undertook

¹ This was one of the pleas urged for the defence in proceedings against an editor who was prosecuted for "publishing without lawful authority information with respect to His Majesty's ships." The defendant pleaded that "he believed the information was well known, if not in London, at any rate all over Lancashire." The case is reported in the *Daily Telegraph* of July 9, 1915.

to do what it could to keep all weather reports out of the newspapers. Thanks to the loyalty and good sense of most of the editors, and to the vigilance of the censors, the desired end was for the most part secured ; but the reason of our action was in some quarters never understood and much sarcasm was expended on us. Everyone must know in a general way about the weather ; and as the reason for suppressing reports was not perceived, it was supposed that " wooden-headed Mandarins " were indulging a freakish taste for silly " obscurantism." Everybody is so much accustomed to reading about the weather that the omission of this item from the Press was felt as a serious deprivation. The matter was lucidly explained when hostilities had ceased by a writer in the *Manchester Guardian* (April 15, 1919) :—

The poor Press Bureau is everyone's butt, and a Sunday paper has just had one more joke against it, because it had complained of the publication of an advertisement on July 28 last, speaking of rain as falling " from Sunday morn to Saturday night." We do not remember the weather of the week preceding July 28, but if the advertisement described it correctly the Press Bureau was quite right. In peace-time the weather forecasts of all Western Europe are based on weather reports from all parts of it. In the war weather forecasting partly broke down, because British and French and German meteorologists were deprived of the usual reports from half the area concerned. On each side's weather maps the lines of isobars, or curves of equal barometrical pressure, broke off short at the front, and so did the information as to temperatures and rainfalls. And yet it was vital to the success of many intended operations to be able

to forecast the weather far ahead and precisely. One of the great German bombing raids on England became a catastrophe for the Germans because they miscalculated the wind for the return journey. Hence a consuming hunger among the weather experts on both sides of the line for every little scrap of news about the weather beyond it. Even an apparently trivial mention of some state of weather in a newspaper or in a captured letter might supply a needed detail in one map of that complete atlas of recent and present weather on which meteorology depends. In compiling that atlas the British army meteorologists were extremely successful during the war. No doubt they were helped by the fact that most of the weather of Western Europe comes from the south-west in winter and from the west in summer, so that more of the sources of the most relevant information were behind our front than behind the German front. Still, even German weather was not unknown. On their side the Germans, for various attacks, pitched on more than one morning of exceptional and very favourable ground mist, though it is hardly credible that this can have been forecast in time to determine the exact morning on which the last great German offensive began last year—perhaps the most helpful morning on which a big attack ever began. It was always of immense importance to them to get any news of weather conditions which might indicate, for instance, an approaching break in the prevalence of westerly and south-westerly winds, the imminence of any such break being a warning to them to get ready to gas our trenches and also to countermand projected air visits to England.

To serious students of war under modern conditions, all this is elementary, but some clever men could never be made to understand it. Even Lord Northcliffe was credited ¹

¹ I say "was credited," for the statement was made in an interview (in the *Overseas Magazine*, August, 1918), of which a proof had not been submitted to Lord Northcliffe.

with the statement that the request to the Press not to describe the weather was one of the most foolish of our restrictions. The reason attributed to Lord Northcliffe for this opinion is worth citing, because it illustrates a very common fallacy about the Press in war-time. It was absurd, he is reported as saying, not to allow full weather reports in our Press, because "the Germans are provided with meteorological instruments that have never failed them to define the weather either here or in France." How did he know? That the Germans had a well equipped meteorological department is true ; that it was never at fault is incorrect. The fact that the enemy were keen to know things, and that they had some means of getting to know them, was a reason not for helping them out and supplementing their own information, but for precisely the contrary course. But this is an aspect of the true principles of censorship which will be considered more fully under our next head. The teaching of right reason in the matter is summed up in Mr. Balfour's dictum already cited: "Let us learn what we can from the enemy ; let us teach him only what we must."

(B).---*That there should be a general presumption in favour of publication.*

This idea was probably more widespread than the preceding. It has much more *prima facie*

justification, and indeed with one very important qualification it could be accepted as expressing the views of the Government and the practice of the Official Press Bureau and the Departments. The qualification is, "other things being equal." The fallacy of the proposition, when applied to particular cases, lay in supposing that other things were equal when in fact they were not.

The misunderstanding took Protean forms. An endeavour is made in the following pages to arrange typical examples under some characteristic forms.

(1) It was suggested that such and such a piece of information, admittedly within the legal prohibitions, need not be censored, because it would presumably be known to spies.

This suggestion was often made as an addendum to the "well-known in the neighbourhood" fallacy already discussed. Thus, complaint was made that "the names of localities where fires and explosions have occurred in England and abroad are as a rule unpublished, although well known to thousands of our inhabitants, and, no doubt, to many German spies residing in their proximity, who are enabled to report the occurrence of them to their headquarters in Germany." It is a Lieutenant-Colonel whose words I am quoting.¹ The same point was often made by others, but the

¹ From a letter in the *Saturday Review*, February 10, 1917.

Colonel should have been better acquainted with the first principles of concealment in war. For observe the assumptions which are made. First we are to assume that everything will be known to spies, and secondly that the said spies will succeed in getting their information through. As the spy *may* know and as the spy *may* get his secret message through, therefore we are to make the enemy's knowledge sure by publishing the information in our freely exported Press. Why in the name of all that is reasonable should we thus make the enemy's information sure? The British public did not sufficiently recognise that publication in our Press was one of the chief sources from which the enemy hoped to derive information. Even if a piece of news were sent by spies, yet publication in British newspapers would provide the enemy with sure and prompt knowledge of what espionage could only convey as rumour. A similar remark applies to other sources of an enemy's information. He must necessarily gain a great deal of information from prisoners and captured documents, but the information may be scrappy or even misleading. Doubt may remain, for instance, in the mind of an enemy commander whether an identification of one or more individuals in places where the bulk of their unit is not stationed is correct. Such confusion of mind should be encouraged, not dispelled. It may lead the enemy to believe that

mixing of units has taken place, when such is not the case. It may lead him to doubt as to whether units or even large formations or reserves may not have been brought up into places which they really do not occupy. It is the business of an efficient censorship to see to it that nothing is published which might resolve an enemy commander's doubts or turn his surmises into certainty.

(2) That any statement published in some place not subject to the British Censorship should have been passed or issued officially here.

On July 2, 1915, a submarine made a successful attack on a German warship in the Baltic. It was announced in Petrograd, and the statement was reproduced in Paris, that the submarine was British. The British Admiralty passed the statement of the success, but not till July 8 did it allow the Naval Censors at the Press Bureau to pass the statement that the submarine in question was British. No incident of the Censorship called forth a greater volume of angry sarcasm on the part of the Press. Of *malice prepense* we had shrouded a splendid British exploit. We were told that we need not be so afraid that the public would suffer from swelled heads. Did we suppose that the German General Staff was unable to read French? We ought to be held responsible for such folly and be sent about our business forthwith. What the writers in the Press forgot was that information about a British naval operation

conveyed by somebody else was not the same thing as information given or confirmed by the British themselves ; and that there may have been excellent reasons for leaving this particular piece of information unconfirmed for a few days, pending the receipt of further news or the completion of certain movements. The tirades in the Press did not surprise us, however, for on the face of it the reasons for this piece of censorship were not apparent, and, truth to tell, we at the Press Bureau were sometimes as much puzzled as was the Press, until we had asked and received enlightenment. The mistake the Press made in such cases was in jumping to the conclusion that the responsible officers at the Admiralty were fools. The whole conduct of the Naval Intelligence Department during the war proves that they were, on the contrary, very shrewd.

This is a consideration which should be borne in mind in relation to a more famous, or notorious, case of official concealment. On November 13, 1918, the Lords of the Admiralty announced through the Press Bureau that "H.M.S. Audacious sank after striking a mine off the North Irish coast on the 27th October, 1914," and the Press had a field-day of sarcastic merriment over the belated announcement. The suppression of this news had indeed for a long time been one of the stock instances of the absurdity of the Censorship. The official announcement explained that

“this was kept secret at the urgent request of the Commander-in-Chief,” and Lord Jellicoe in his book had already given his reasons. So many of our capital ships had developed defects at the time when the “Audacious” was mined that the margin between the Germans and ourselves became “unpleasantly small.” This was the reason—an entirely proper one, said *The Times*—why the loss was concealed as long as possible. So *The Times* wrote on February 12, 1919, conveniently oblivious of the fact that five years before it had given prominence to a letter signed “Audax” in which the Admiralty was soundly rated for not publishing the loss (December 4, 1914). The Admiralty stated further that “the Press loyally refrained from giving it any publicity.” This, though true in the main, was giving the Press a little more than its due, for more than one paper had covertly given publicity to the loss, and highly respectable Reviews had stated it outright. The reason why the Press thought reticence absurd is worth noting, because it illustrates a general principle of sound censorship. What was the good, it was asked, of preventing the British Press from publishing the facts when the disaster had been witnessed by the passengers on board the “Olympic,” who spread the story in America, so that American newspapers printed full stories and pictures? But what the Press forgot was that the American reports included two versions, one

that the "Audacious" had been sunk, the other that she had been towed to harbour. What the enemy wanted to know was which version was true. Was the ship *kaput*, or might she presently rejoin the fleet? The Press would have liked to tell them. The Admiralty wanted to leave them as long as possible in doubt. I hope I am not guilty of *lèse majesté* against the Press in suggesting that on such a question the view of the Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet was more entitled to respect than that of Fleet Street, and in thinking that the editor of the *Quarterly Review* should not have felt himself at liberty to override Lord Jellicoe's wishes.

The general principle of censorship, which is the contradiction of the fallacy here in question, may thus be stated: The confirmation of an enemy statement or contradiction may sometimes convey information of use to him.

It was often shown to be undesirable even to quote enemy statements at all, and a further fallacy may thus be stated.

(3) That there could be no objection to the reproduction of enemy statements.

This notion was widely held, and we were often thought to be irrational or needlessly fussy when we sought—sometimes unsuccessfully—to dissuade the papers from republishing enemy statements, and more generally when we subjected the

German Wireless Propaganda Messages to very rigorous censorship.

It will be convenient to describe here how the German Wireless was treated. All Press matter intercepted by wireless was sent to the Press Bureau. It was decided early in the war that the official *communiqués* signed by the German Headquarters Staff should be issued to our Press, and only on the rarest occasions, when some special military reason intervened, were such wireless messages either delayed or censored. The Government held, and I think rightly, that it might be taken as a sign of weakness, or as arguing a desire to conceal, or as showing a lack of confidence in the good sense of the British people, if they were not allowed to hear, and to hear at once, what the enemy claimed with regard to military operations. I believe that no other European belligerent followed a like course. There was one occasion—that of the Battle of Jutland—when the British authorities were blamed by some of the newspapers, not for delay or concealment, but for over-alacrity in publishing the official German account.

The case was very different with enemy statements, which were at best only semi-official and of which the object was to wage war by propaganda. Copies of such messages were, of course, sent by the Bureau to the various Departments and, when thought desirable, counter propaganda was

set in motion. But it was often not desirable to confirm, correct, or argue about the enemy statements. Rigorous censorship was therefore applied. The British papers were far more widely distributed over the world than the Press of any other country, and there was at least one part of the world which was out of reach of the German Wireless and depended for its news on the British Press alone. It was naturally decided not to assist the enemy by spreading his propagandist messages for him. When the German Wireless contained genuine news which was of an official character, or which was at once interesting and innocuous, or when for some reason, though avowedly propagandist, its circulation by us seemed more likely to do good than harm, such messages or parts of messages were promptly passed on to our Press. Ministerial statements in the Reichstag, for instance, often reached this country earliest by wireless, and were at once issued to all the papers. Mischievous propaganda was not. Telegrams containing similar matter were more leniently dealt with, and the papers, when the censorship of foreign affairs was suspended, were left with the largest power of exercising their own discretion. Occasionally in passing a message the Directors wrote a private letter to the editor—not as presuming to dictate to him, but in order to make sure that the message should receive special attention. In such cases

it was very interesting to me as an old editor to note next morning how the message had been treated. Sometimes it was published intact; more often it was rigorously censored in the newspaper office.

In the case of transit telegrams, *i.e.*, telegrams passing over British lines from one foreign country to another—the case for rigorous censorship was overwhelming. To one complainant, or at least inquirer, this answer was given :—

May I in turn ask you a question? We are engaged, as you know, in a life and death struggle with a very powerful and a very resourceful foe. Now, put yourself, please, in our place, and imagine the following case which, if you will, we will call hypothetical :—Suppose you found that your cables were being used to send reports which, when not absolutely untrue, are intended to magnify German victories, to preach the doctrine of German all-powerfulness, to depreciate this country and her Allies, and to do everything that is possible to influence Germans throughout the world, and Neutrals wherever they may be found to sympathise with Germany and her Allies, to push her propaganda, advance her cause, vilify England and our Allies, and to stir up hatred against us in every corner of the globe where it seems possible to embarrass us—suppose you found this to be going on, what would you do?

The question was not answered. I think it may be assumed that silence gave an implied assent to the proposition that anybody else would have done the same as we did. There were neutral correspondents sitting at enemy headquarters and being fed daily with enemy propaganda, and

writing flamboyant accounts about the impenetrable walls of German steel, who really thought that it was our bounden duty to spread such stuff to the hurt of our country all over the world. Even members of the British Parliament seemed to share this odd belief.

So much for the more obvious cases in which, contrary to a widely held view, there were strong reasons against the circulation of enemy statements; but in the subtlety of enemy propaganda, further and less obvious reasons existed for great care in the matter. This aspect of the case was expounded and illustrated in a statement issued by the Directors of the Press Bureau (May 1, 1918), which, as it was not very widely or fully printed by the newspapers at the time, may here be set out:—

In successive editions of the Official Press Bureau summary of Instructions to the Press, the following note has appeared:—

“Much matter comes from German sources in the shape of quotations from German correspondents or extracts from German newspapers. In repeating such matter, newspapers are invited carefully to consider how far they may really be assisting German international propaganda. The origin of the statement should always be mentioned, both in the text and upon newspaper posters.”

It has sometimes been questioned whether this precautionary note was necessary, but the enemy is very quick to take advantage, and a case which occurred in the German propaganda wireless of yesterday shows that the mention in the British Press of the enemy origin of statements reproduced is not always a sufficient safeguard against perversion.

In the *Daily Mail* of April 18 last there appeared an article from which the following is an extract :—

“WHAT THE HUNS SAY ABOUT US NOW.

By Our Former Berlin Correspondent.

“ Britain is now being portrayed to the German public as trembling with panic and haunted by terrifying visions of the loss of the war. Instead of the universal spirit of grim resolution which has dominated the nation since the opening hour of the Hun offensive, the enemy is told that the following (from the semi-official *Cologne Gazette*) is the state of affairs :—

“ Then it is proposed to hold back tens of thousands of men for the dockyards and shipbuilding industry. Naturally these will have to be young and sturdy men. Old men cannot make good the dangerously heavy losses caused by U-boats. One cannot simultaneously carry out a great shipbuilding programme and mobilise large new armies.

“ In addition to all this, England has troops stationed all over the world, from Archangel to Hong-kong, which must be reinforced and relieved. England's national strength, which to-day is strained to the utmost, is like the candle which is being burned at both ends ; yet in view of the threatened defeat any measure, however desperate, is welcome to the powers that be.

“ And yet the hour will come when a second Lord Chatham, who in 1778 showed the House of Commons the impossibility of defeating America, will say to England's present governors : ‘ You cannot defeat Germany.’ ”

In the “ News from Berlin transmitted through the Wireless Stations of the German Government ” intercepted on April 30, there appears a passage of which the following is a translation :—

“ The *Daily Mail* of April 18 contains the following remarkable statement concerning submarine losses :—‘ It is

proposed to keep back thousands of workmen for docks and shipbuilding. It is clear that this can only refer to young strong men, as old men could not make good the seriously heavy losses caused by the activity of the U-boats. It is, however, impossible to carry out at one and the same time a big shipbuilding programme and to raise big armies. Added to this, English troops are scattered all over the world, from Archangel to Hong-kong, and have to be provided with supplies of provisions. And so England's national strength is being strained to the utmost. She is burning the candle at both ends. But in face of the threatened defeat every means, even the most desperate, seems right to those who are now in power, and yet the hour will come when, like a second Chatham, who in 1778 pointed out to the House of Commons the impossibility of conquering America, the present ruler of England will say: "It is impossible to conquer Germany." " "

This latter extract will reach all neutral countries, and readers who have not the means of ascertaining the truth may suppose that it is a true extract from the British Press. The present instance is by no means an isolated one, but it is so flagrant and conspicuous that it is worth quoting in order to show the danger that sometimes attends the publication in British newspapers of extracts from the enemy Press.

The general rule of censorship which may be deduced from all this is : be careful not to assist enemy propaganda.

The next, and the concluding rule, is of a comprehensive kind. The corresponding fallacy—a fallacy implied in an infinite number of complaints and inquiries—is this :

(4) That little things could not matter.

For instance, why in the world, we were asked,

did you object to our publishing a picture of the King inspecting some troops? The answer is that the picture showed who the troops were and that the German General Staff must be credited with sufficient perspicacity to know that an inspection by His Majesty was usually—as in fact it was in this case—made just before a unit was to proceed to the Front. The picture was of direct use to the enemy.

The more general answer is that the collection of naval or military information by an acute Intelligence Section is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. The location of the smallest piece may help towards building up the whole. In an earlier chapter (p. 21) some instances have been given from the Franco-German War of 1870, and such instances showed that the duty of our censorship was to prevent the enemy General Staff from finding out the same kind of little things. We may best consider the duty of censorship on our side by studying the work of our Intelligence Section in the field. What our General Staff was able to piece together about German movements and intentions was what the German General Staff would like to find out about the movements and intentions on the side of the Allies. It was the duty of the Censorship, at the Front and at the Press Bureau, to see to it that the enemy should find out as little as possible, and this duty often consisted in the censoring of

little and seemingly unimportant pieces of information. In the final despatch from Sir Douglas Haig there is this passage :—

Under the able, energetic and successful directions of Brigadier-General J. Charteris, the Intelligence Section of my General Staff Branch was developed into a far-reaching and most efficient organisation for the rapid collection, sifting and dissemination of information concerning the disposition movements and intentions of the enemy. The activities of the Intelligence Section were incessant, and the knowledge obtained thereby of the utmost value.

A writer in the Press, who was, I imagine, speaking with inside knowledge, has described the kind of little things from which by ingenious collation the Intelligence Section built up its knowledge of what was going on “on the other side of the hill,” and then he points the moral for the censorship. The passage which follows is a continuation of the article in the *Manchester Guardian* from which an explanation of the censorship of weather reports has been quoted above (p. 142) :—

What was true of weather news behind each front was, of course, true of all other news too. From any high point behind its front line each side looked across the trenches into a landscape apparently uninhabited and long dead. In place of this first blank impression, the Intelligence of each side had to build up, line by line and dot by dot, a complete map or picture of the whole universe of activity that was there going on. It had to be able to place correctly every unit of the opposite army, every field hospital, every aerodrome, every battery, every railhead and

dump. When this was done it knew what was in the enemy's mind. The relative quality and the relative density of infantry and artillery at one or another part of the line obviously expressed either a local offensive intention or an apprehension of having to meet one. A large local increase of field hospitals indicated more definitely a coming offensive. The relative frequency and direction of laden trains in any particular area far behind the enemy's front was a legible sign. Every stir of activity, every slight change in the distribution of troops, guns, camps, stores, road traffic, telephone wires, was expressive. Any indiscreet word let fall in a private letter might, if it fell into the enemy's hands—and the other side's letters home were always rated as treasures to capture—supply a small touch in the general picture—a touch so small that the precautions against these indiscretions sometimes irritated those whom they restrained and who could no more see the possible importance of such minutiae than one can see the importance of a pinhead dot when looked at in isolation, though, when no longer isolated, it may form the eye that completes a whole drawing of a face, gives it expression, and identifies the sitter. The credit of creating, on the British side, an organisation which, throughout the war on the Western Front, kept the changing movements and dispositions of the enemy's forces constantly before the eyes of our own high command, so that Sir Douglas Haig could at all times see the whole German army, every division in its exact place, as a man standing looks at a raised map on the floor—this credit belongs mainly to Brigadier-General J. Charteris. The German Intelligence Department, some of whose attempts to map out our dispositions were captured in our advances, were far less successful, and in several captured German orders the craft and subtlety of General Charteris's arrangement for finding out were mentioned with the rueful respect due to a skill approaching the demonic. The other side of the work was to keep the Germans from learning as much. Of course it meant a little annoyance for a few people on our side. But, besides all else that it meant, it meant keeping down casualties. Every bit of

information that a belligerent gets means first the killing of a good many men on the other side. The Press Bureau did make a few mistakes on the side of caution; but people who might have had their friends killed if it had been more easy-going generally, and have got them back now, will not be too hard on it.

Every expert in the business of collecting military intelligence will say the same about the great importance of paying attention to little things. "Each detail taken by itself," says Marshal von der Goltz, "may be valueless, but may yet serve as a valuable link in a chain which leads at last to a conclusion." There cannot be many officers who have held an important post in the Naval Intelligence Department for a longer period than did Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge, and this is what he says¹ :—

It will, perhaps, be difficult to get the man in the street to believe it; still it is a fact—if known only to those who have been engaged in the work—that the collection, report, and publication of information concerning naval and military movements and circumstances constitute a veritable art, inattention to the rules of which is likely to cause serious inconvenience or worse. One of the most important rules is—never to treat with contempt any piece of information, however trivial it may appear at first. An apparently insignificant sentence in an obscure provincial newspaper has been known to fill a gap in a collection of intelligence which previously had seemed quite inconclusive. The published report of a street accident has led to the localisation of an important foreign force. One can picture without difficulty the eagerness with which hostile

¹ *The Times*, November 13, 1915.

intelligence officers await the arrival of newspapers published in both the Allied and neutral countries. Information, of course, does not come only from newspapers; but their columns are undoubtedly amongst its most important sources. The absolute exclusion—if practicable—of all reference to naval and military affairs from the newspapers of a belligerent country would be a serious obstacle to the collection of useful information by an enemy. This exclusion, perhaps, would not be pleasant for the public in the country concerned; it would certainly be most unwelcome to the hostile Intelligence Department.

As long as a war lasts there is no limit to the length of time that ought to elapse before a full report of naval and military operations can be safely published. Intelligence officers can learn a great deal from a report, no matter how belated the date of its publication. It will, at the least, enable them to understand other reports and will help them to estimate the temperament of the authority supervising the compilation of the document. It is, of course, possible in a published statement to do justice to the gallantry of a particular body of soldiers or seamen; but the statement had better not be descriptive of their proceedings, or else the enemy will be nearly sure to learn something from it. A matter of the highest importance is to obtain intelligence about the enemy's movements and circumstances; and nearly as important is—not to let him know how much you really know about him.

Such total exclusion as Admiral Bridge suggested was neither possible nor, as has been argued on previous pages, desirable. The policy of the British Government was, on the contrary, to allow the publication of as much as possible, but this policy made it all the more important that the censors both in the field and in Whitehall should never relax their vigilance. Few things would have pleased the enemy more than any

great relaxation of the censorship in deference to popular criticism. "Much satisfaction," said a British correspondent in a neutral capital, "is felt in German naval and military circles at the attacks now being made on the English Censor by certain British newspapers. Instructions have been issued by the German Censor to the Press forbidding any reference to this, in the hope that the power of the English Censorship may be weakened by a continuance of these attacks."¹ Fortunately it was not weakened either in consequence of clamour or for fear of making mistakes in the other direction ; and it should be a source of satisfaction to all who were concerned in the difficult and delicate task of Censorship that the mistakes most loudly bruited about were made on the side of caution,²

¹ A telegram from Berne printed in the *Morning Post*, April 26, 1915.

² As, for instance, in the excision by a censor at the Bureau of "the kings" from an account of some incident at the Front in which the writer had quoted Mr. Kipling's words "The captains and the kings depart." The Press made a prodigious fuss over this, and Sir John Simon, then Home Secretary, dealt faithfully with the Censor in Parliament, advising him more strictly to meditate the thankless muse, and raising a further laugh in the House by explaining that "as no kings were present, it was not thought right to say that they had departed." But the Censor was working in a hurry. The letter was describing a part of the Front where the King of the Belgians might have been present, and it was a matter of special importance to keep His Majesty's movements secret. Was it so very terrible a mistake to have read a veiled meaning into the words, instead of recognising them as a Fleet-street *cliché* (as we call such things), which had no meaning at all? It was a case of too much caution on the safe side. The correspondent of *The Times* at the Front in an account of the fighting at Hulluch (October 13, 1915), in describing the

and not on that of imperilling the lives of any sailor or soldier.

storm of bombs, shells, gases, and other means of destruction which fell upon the enemy, spatchcocked in "Twenty-nine distinct damnations, One sure, if another fails." A too careful censor—presumably a soldier in the field—thought twenty-nine too precise and altered the word to "different." Probably he did not recognise the quotation from Browning, and a soldier may well be pardoned for not being familiar with the "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister." In any case the incident showed nothing worse than excess of zeal on the safe side. But *The Times* thought the affair worth a leading article, and, harking back to "captains and kings," asked "Is it conceivable that the Censors number two such idiots in their ranks?" (October 19, 1915.) Yet even Jupiter Tonans nods, and I expect that there were some Censors who smiled when *The Times* not long afterwards was taken in by a clumsy forgery of a piece by Mr. Kipling, and when, not understanding an abbreviation in a despatch "from our own Special Correspondent" about German politics, it solemnly informed us that whereas "Herr Theodor Wolff is trying to build up a Democratic Party of bourgeois elements, *Herr Natlibs* and the old Radicals are trying to arrange for mutual assistance at the elections." (November 21, 1918.)

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

WE have now concluded our survey of the manner in which the British Press was censored in the Great War, but the most remarkable feature of our newspapers during that time was that they bore no palpable trace of having been censored at all. An outside observer, if he chanced to miss the occasional tirades against the Press Bureau, might reasonably have concluded that there was no censorship in force. For one thing, there were no such blank spaces or smudged-out columns, as from time to time appeared in foreign newspapers. Our editors were from the first requested by the Official Press Bureau not to indicate in any way where matter had been taken out by the Censor ; and, with one or two exceptions, the request was observed throughout the war. The reason for our rule was that it seemed obviously undesirable to give the enemy or his agents any hint as to the subjects or information which were being censored. One of the most artful of the tricks used by the German Propaganda Bureau afforded an incidental

justification of the British rule. "The Central Empires," said a message to one of our papers from Milan," are filling in blank spaces left by the Censor in certain Italian papers and are printing therein sensational notices which are received and believed as having been printed in Italy."¹

But it was not only the absence of any external traces of censorship that might have led an outsider to conclude that there was no unseen hand at work. What the British Press contained was equally remarkable. It was full of war news and still fuller of war views. And both the news and the views were presented by many of the papers with every emphasis that headlines and a highly-spiced vocabulary could lend. The contrast in all this between the British and the French newspapers was very marked. Is the Press of a country a mirror of the national character? If so, this is one of many respects in which the Great War will require some alteration to be made in the popular conception of the several national characteristics. It was the French Press that was marked by reticence, coolness, and phlegm. I counted one day, when the British Press had its usual sheets of war news and criticism, how much space was given to the subject in French papers. It varied from two to four columns. Of course allowance has to be

¹ I omitted when cutting out this piece to note its source. I think it was from the *Morning Post*, September 13, 1915.

made for the smaller size of the French papers, but the contrast was equally marked in the range of the war news and in the manner of its presentation. The French news on the day in question was largely taken second-hand from the British papers, including passages from the *Official Eye-Witness*; and throughout the war there was in the French Press a complete absence of the methods of loud display followed by most of our papers. Indeed the heading "La Guerre" was almost as quiet and small as the "Choses Variées" of ordinary times. As for criticism, the British Press was never free from it. Each War Government in turn was made the target of invective; and the papers, which even more than Lord Bowen's lawyers are acutely conscious of each other's shortcomings, tore and rent each other's "experts," methods, and opinions to pieces with unflagging spirit. Counsel for the defendant in a Press prosecution complained that the liberty of free criticism was being interfered with. The magistrate,¹ in deciding the case against him, said that, on the contrary, there had never been "such liberty—or licence—whichever might be the word," in the way of criticism.

So, then, it might well seem to an outsider as if the Press had been left completely free. Yet, all the while, as we have seen in earlier chapters,

¹ Sir John Dickinson at Bow Street, reported in *The Times*, February 22, 1918.

the British Press was subjected—in some matters compulsorily, in others voluntarily—to constant and vigilant censorship.

That the Censorship was necessary, and, though no doubt it made mistakes, that it did some service to the country and her Allies, will, I think, have been made clear in the course of this essay.¹

The point which I desire to argue in conclusion is that the restraint put upon the Press did not interfere with the discharge of the functions which, as defined in the first chapter, belong to the Press in war-time, and by which the Press may render invaluable support to the national cause.

The first of these functions is the support of the Home Front. The Press was left entirely free to sustain the spirit and determination of the people in whatever way it chose. In practice some papers adopted one manner, others adopted another, and some adopted one manner at one time and another at another time. Some painted every event and tendency and prospect in the blackest, and others in the brightest, colours. Hence the

¹ The greatest compliment paid to the British Censorship came from the enemy. In one of the letters found on Mr. Archibald, Count Bernstorff complained that this country had a "Press Bureau that in its efficiency and imaginative powers has never had its equal in the history of the world." (See the White Paper, Cd. 8012, 1915.) That was probably higher praise than was deserved, but it may be taken as good evidence that the British Press contained a great deal that the enemy did not like, and that the British Censorship prevented the appearance of a great deal that he would have liked.

wordy warfare that went on unceasingly between the optimists and the pessimists. Some said that it was all the fault of the Press Bureau—sometimes for issuing news too favourable, at other times for issuing too little or not putting a better gloss upon it. A *reductio ad absurdum* of this sort of criticism was made by Lord Sydenham, who said that the operations of the Censorship “have had the effect of creating undue optimism in some minds, and alarm, perhaps exaggerated, in others.” The comment of a writer in another paper upon this remarkable utterance was much to the point. “These words must prove,” he said, “to every intelligent reader that Lord Sydenham would be the ideal head of a reconstructed Press Bureau, by whose operations the optimist and the pessimist would be supplied daily with different accounts of the same events, painted for the former in sombre and depressing hues, and for the latter in bright and attractive colours. Half the Press might cater for the optimists and half for the pessimists, and a well-managed Press Bureau would easily arrange so to classify the population (with the help of the National Register) that the poison and the antidote would be supplied in proper doses to all readers, and no fatal mistakes would be made by putting the opiates and the stimulants into the wrong bottles, or newspapers, as the case might be.”¹ This chaffing comment

¹ The *Morning Post*, October 15, 1915.

described exactly what happened in the Press, for the constant annoyance of optimists and pessimists respectively seems to show that the optimist doses reached the pessimists and the pessimist doses the optimists. The Bureau had nothing to do with it. Its business was to issue news, not to colour it, and the news—good, bad, or indifferent, according as the varying fortune of war decided—was issued as it came. It was the Press which coloured it whether by headlines or by comment, and the colour varied with the temper, method, and intelligence of each newspaper. But it is to be noted that these variations did not interfere with a constant effort on the part of the Press as a whole to sustain the spirit of the people. The optimists said, “See how well things are going! We have only to stand firm and the war will be won.” The pessimists said, “See how badly things are going. We must put in more effort or the war will be lost.” There were minds and temperaments, I daresay, to which each kind of sermon was useful.

At any rate, the Press was left free to take its own line. No optimism and no pessimism was supplied to order. In one conspicuous case it may well be doubted whether official detachment in this respect was not carried too far. The Press was left to make what it could of the first news from the Battle of Jutland, and it must be admitted that a mess was made of it. The Admi-

rally put out through the Press Bureau the bald facts and did not at first help the editors to interpret them. The result was not happy. "We have sustained," said one paper, "though we have also inflicted, serious naval losses off the coast of Jutland. The first Admiralty *communiqué*, brief though it is, leaves no room for doubt on that." The Germans were credited with "a partial success, snatched from us upon our own element." The battle was "an unfortunate incident—nothing more." Another paper wrote of it as "a check"—not to the enemy but to this country. Yet another, in writing of "this grave disaster and unlooked for reverse," said that "we must admit defeat." It was pointed out at the time¹ that many of these writers improved the occasion of an imaginary defeat to air their pet personal and political grievances. One writer, more careful than some others in appreciation of the battle itself, hit out at the end at the politicians, "at the miserable Declaration of London and at Sir Edward Grey's attitude of pompous impartiality." Another visited the check upon some new policy attributed to Mr. Balfour, "which stands condemned. Nothing but harm can result when naval strategy and tactics are allowed to be overborne by civilian craving for the spectacular."

¹ By the *West Sussex Gazette*, June 8, whose reprint of an article of that date is worth a glance from historians of the Press.

“In the face of yesterday’s news,” said a third, “the demand for the return of Lord Fisher to effective control of the Navy must again become insistent.” Such utterances in the British Press almost justified the speech of the Kaiser when he visited his fleet at Wilhelmshaven after the battle. “The superior British Armada approached, and our fleet engaged it, and what happened? The British Fleet was beaten. . . . The world was prepared for anything, but never for the victory of the German fleet over the British. A start has been made. Fear will creep into the bones of the enemy.” The Empire owes a debt of gratitude to the General Secretary of the Navy League, who, lest the pessimistic tone of the British Press should be carried overseas, took it on himself without a moment’s delay to cable to every one of the League’s branches that “the greatest victory since Trafalgar had been achieved.”¹ This message was nearer the truth than the first articles in the Press. The first Admiralty *communiqué* told the truth as then known, and the essential fact was correctly stated in this paragraph.

The German Battle Fleet, aided by low visibility, avoided prolonged action with our main forces, and soon after these appeared on the scene the enemy returned to port, though not before receiving severe damage from our battleships.

¹ Report of a presentation to Mr. Hannon, in *The Times* June 1, 1919.

The mistake which the Press made was, as Mr. Asquith pointed out, in fixing upon our losses and ignoring the full significance of the paragraph just quoted. "The real meaning of an engagement of this kind," he said, "is not to be measured merely or mainly by striking a balance actual or even relative of material and personal gain and loss. . . . The crucial question is, What has been the effect of the battle and its consequences? . . . A victory! A couple more such victories and there will be nothing left worth speaking of of the German Navy." The couple more were not needed. The taste of the British Fleet, given at the battle of Jutland, sufficed to turn "The Day" of the Germans into the Night. Mr. Asquith spoke on June 14, when things were generally seen in true perspective. That is one of the standing advantages possessed by the politicians over the Press. The politician can bide his time. The journalist has to write in hot haste on the spur of the moment, and on this occasion his first thoughts were not fortunate. The blame for the erroneous conclusions drawn from the first British reports of the battle was laid by the Press upon the Admiralty, and it cannot be gainsaid that the wording of the first *communiqué* was ill-advised. But, observe, if the whole blame is to be thrown upon the Admiralty, it can only be done at the cost of some claims and criticisms made by the Press. The German fleet was near to its base, the enemy reports

were sure to be out quickly, and the Admiralty had to say something. But the British Fleet was far from its base, and reports came in slowly. The Admiralty, like other Departments, had been adjured to conceal nothing and to issue news speedily. Let it tell the truth, and the Press could be trusted to do all else that was necessary. So on second or third thoughts it did, but for the moment it went astray, and Mr. Balfour's good-natured reply to his critics was to the point. If, said he, there were any papers which gave prominence to our losses only without taking into account the paragraph above cited, he did not wish them to be tortured by remorse. It would satisfy him "if a little prick of conscience were to reach them in order that those editors may know that man in general is fallible and not incapable of making mistakes."¹

This episode in the history of the British Press during the Great War serves to illustrate the present argument in more ways than one. It shows, in the first place, how free was the Press to publish opinions. It has some bearing also on the next function of the Press which we have to consider—the function, namely, of publishing news. With regard to official news, the Jutland *communiqués* were instances of frank publication, and much the same may be said of the British

¹ Speech at the British Imperial Council of Commerce, June 8, 1916.

bulletins generally. Of course no commander always tells the whole truth. In accordance with the general rule of censorship already discussed, he is careful in anything intended for publication not to reveal useful information which the enemy might not otherwise obtain. No commander, for instance, will state the extent of his losses in a battle. There were one or two cases in which British *communiqués* were criticised for lack of clearness or candour, but on the whole they were comparatively free from such *clichés* of deception as the German "fighting is in progress," which meant that a severe defeat had been sustained. Sometimes the candour of the commanders and the Government was overborne by the optimism of the newspapers. Mr. Bonar Law gave as an instance the Government's desire to tell the public that the battle of Suvla Bay had failed in its objective. "After the expedition to the Dardanelles and the attack of August 6 all the papers were speaking as if we had won a very great victory. We knew that we had, compared with what we aimed at, suffered a great failure, although we had a certain amount of success. We did not wish that impression of victory to be conveyed, and it was decided at the Cabinet that a true and careful account of exactly what had happened should be prepared and issued to the Press. This was done. The object was to give a correct impression of what had happened.

But what did we see? Coming down to the office the next morning I saw on all the posters in big headlines, 'Gain of 800 yards at Gallipoli.' Such was the only result of our attempt to put this matter in a true perspective."¹ Some sound advice was given in this connection by one of the editors to his *confrères*. " *Communiqués*," he said, "should always be interpreted discreetly; and, if we are able to read them with understanding, we must sometimes read between the lines. If an official *communiqué* states a local success, it is not well to convert it into a decisive victory; and if an official *communiqué* states a victory, it is not well to trumpet the end of the war and the annihilation, or even the decimation, of the enemy." "We hold no kind of brief," said the same writer, "for the Press Bureau, but it is only fair to say that its announcements have been marked by care and sobriety throughout."² The credit belongs to the commanders and the Home Government. The crowning instance of frankness was the publication of Sir Douglas Haig's Order after the successful German offensive in the spring of 1918,³ but throughout the war the

¹ *The Times*, November 16, 1915. Cp., for instance, the case, which was discussed in the House of Commons, about "Hill 70." The matter was analysed exhaustively in the *Manchester Guardian*, October 16, 1915.

² *The Saturday Review*, August 28, 1915.

³ This Order—the famous "backs to the wall" one of April 13, 1918,—was too strong meat for some, and we were asked if it was really meant for publication.

British Government in its communication of news trusted the Press and the public and, subject only to military considerations at the time, the censorship was not used to keep the home public in the dark. Some people thought that at times the frankness of the Government went too far. Did any of the belligerents publish despatches from the commanders so soon or so fully as ours? Did any of the belligerents take the country so far into its confidence as ours did? I remember seeing a paragraph quoted from some newspaper (I think the *Morning Post*) which pointed a moral by heading it "The Difference":—"Our Ministers said that the submarine menace is very serious, and the German public at once conclude that England in a few weeks will be suing for mercy. But no German statesman ever thinks of remarking that the situation on the Western front line is serious." The difference was abundantly justified by the result.

With regard to unofficial news, it was in many ways unfortunate that authorised correspondents were not sent to the Front at the first, and the irritation of the Press was the greater because it had been understood that they should be allowed to go and appointments had been made. Experienced correspondents, whose discretion could be relied on, were for weeks kept waiting at home booted and spurred. But the extreme importance of secrecy in the opening moves, the

indiscretion of some freelances, and the opinion of our Allies must be remembered. It will be well to reprint here an announcement made in our Press on December 2, 1914 :—

The Government has instructed the Director of the Press Bureau to make the following announcement to the Press and the public in regard to Special Newspaper Correspondents at the seat of war :—

1. The decision to exclude the correspondents of newspapers from the lines of the Allied Armies in France and Belgium was originally taken in accordance with the decision of the French Government to exclude correspondents from their own lines.

2. This rule has very recently been relaxed as the result of an arrangement between the Governments of France and Great Britain with the concurrence of General Joffre, the Commander-in-Chief.

3. In consequence of this relaxation a party of selected journalists has been allowed to visit the lines of the French Army. The selection was made by the French Government as the date was fixed by them at too short notice to enable the British Government to take any part in the selection.

4. Arrangements are being made, with General Joffre's consent, for the dispatch of another party of British correspondents to visit the lines of the Allied Armies. The members of this last-named party will be selected by arrangement with the British Government; due notice will be issued of the further steps which will be taken to secure that, so far as the necessarily limited numbers of the party will permit, the selection shall be of an impartial and representative character.

With regard to the British correspondents at the British Front, their facilities for reporting and

describing were at first too much circumscribed. According to Lord Burnham, "the men who at first went abroad for the Press were treated as if they were criminals let loose ; war correspondents were locked up in stalls by a corporal's guard." ¹ It is not clear whether Lord Burnham was here referring to authorised or unauthorised correspondents, and the movements of the latter would rightly be subjected to discipline ; but in another speech he says that as late as June, 1915, "he saw many Press correspondents playing cricket in the grounds of the château at St. Omer, which they were not allowed to leave." ² All this, however, was presently altered, owing to very proper protests by the Press and to the persistence of its representative, Sir George Riddell. In the latter years of the war, the authorised correspondents had ample facilities and every reasonable measure of freedom, and they did excellent work. They can have had no more regular, eager, and appreciative readers than were to be found in the rooms of the Directors and Secretary at the Press Bureau, for we made it our personal concern to expedite in every possible way the delivery of these important messages, which, moreover, were addressed not to the papers direct, but to the care of the Directors. How

¹ Speech at a dinner given by the Newspaper Proprietors' Conference, July 2, 1919.

² Speech reported in *The Times*, June 26, 1919.

well we came to know the style, the mannerisms, the moods of the several correspondents ! But it would be impertinent to particularise. I content myself with endorsing as a newspaper-reader what the Newspaper Proprietors have said of the work of their correspondents. "They were proud of the record of the war correspondents who had painted the glories and horrors of the war in black and white" (Lord Burnham).¹ "The spirit of the country was in no small measure due to the magnificent descriptions written by these correspondents of the heroic deeds of the British Army" (Sir George Riddell).²

We come next to the functions of the Press as critic and propagandist. How did the system of mingled Press restraint and Press liberty work here ? I shall take the two functions together, for criticism and propaganda are necessarily connected very closely. One of the questions which must always be of great difficulty to a patriotic Press in war-time, and which in a lesser degree gave the Press Bureau some anxiety, is how to reconcile salutary criticism with the national interest. To expose defects may be to give valuable information to the enemy ; and even if it does not

¹ Speech at the Newspaper Press Fund Dinner, May 27, 1919.

² Speech at a dinner given by the Newspaper Proprietors' Conference, July 2, 1919.

do that, it may damage the country in neutral opinion. The rule which the Directors of the Press Bureau laid down for themselves was, contrary to some suppositions on the subject, to interfere as little as possible with military criticism and not at all with political criticism. I said that the question concerned us in a less degree than the Press because the papers as a rule did not consult us in such cases. The main responsibility was theirs, and it may be asked, How was it discharged? A warning note was struck early in the war by the *Daily Telegraph*. Its correspondent at Rotterdam sent the following message :—

The *Morgenpost* says it has received information from an irrefutable source that Earl Kitchener's new army has no food, no underclothing, and no soap. That it is crowded into barracks which are filthy and crawl with vermin. Certain statements, no doubt distorted, are quoted from English papers in proof of this. It should be understood that public comment on defects in public affairs in time of peace may be exceedingly valuable, but there is no doubt that at present they are encouraging the enemy, who does not comprehend English methods.

The practice of free criticism and the habit of self-disparagement at home undoubtedly went ill with our reputation abroad. Some of those who took the most useful part in presenting the British effort to the American and foreign peoples were the same who at an earlier stage of the war had by intemperate language helped to spread the erro-

neous idea that the British were a nation of "slackers" and were not pulling their weight in the Allied boat. One of the Dominion Press representatives came across people in the Allied countries "who thought England was ready to make peace so as to escape from further sacrifices." When he came here, he found, on the contrary, "a grim, determined people—determined to go into the last ditch and to pay the uttermost farthing." He threw upon the Censorship the blame for the spreading of a false impression. "Why," he asked, "did not the Censor prevent Lord Lansdowne from writing letters and newspapers from publishing them?"¹ The Censor was given no chance of doing either; and if he had been, he would not have used it to prevent such legitimate discussion as was contained in Lord Lansdowne's letters. But on the main point—the indirect harm done from a propagandist point of view by some of the tirades against "slackers"—it may be doubted, I think, if even now the evil effect has completely been wiped out.

Sometimes, again, the Press did not, as it seems to me, sufficiently bear in mind the effect which its criticism of the authorities must have upon enemy opinion. For instance, on the night of January 31, 1916, there was a Zeppelin raid in

¹ Speech by Mr. J. S. Currie, M.P. (Newfoundland), at Glasgow, reported in *The Times*, August 22, 1918.

the Midland counties, and the official *communiqué* limited itself to saying :

A Zeppelin raid by six or seven airships took place last night over the eastern, north-eastern and Midland counties.

A number of bombs were dropped, but up to the present no considerable damage has been reported.

A further statement will be issued as soon as practicable.

On the next morning but one after the raid, one of our principal papers, in pursuit of its campaign for more publicity, complained that the Government had not given a fuller account of what really happened. The ground stated for the complaint was that the publication of all the facts would bring the war home to many people who still treated it as if it were some distant affair having no concern with their daily life. But now turn to a necessary result of such criticism. The article had said, "Those who experienced Monday's raid at first hand, and then read the published accounts of it, will be able to form some impression of the methods which are applied to every scene of operations."¹ The natural deduction to be made from such language was that the Government was keeping back disastrous news, and the *Cologne Gazette* (February 6) seized upon the article, saying that it demonstrated the deceptive nature of the English reports, insinuating

¹ *The Times*, February 2, 1916.

that grave military damage had been done and gloating over imaginary disasters.¹

As for the violence of political criticism in which sections of the Press indulged during the war, it appears to have made an unpleasant impression upon some of those who were fighting at the Front. "Coming back to the House after nearly a year at the Front," said Colonel Mildmay (December 21, 1916), "he had felt quite dazed with the atmosphere of personal recrimination which was prevalent in the lobby. . . . Among the worst offenders were some of those who professed to support the new Government. Could they not feel that they were queering the pitch of the Prime Minister by abusing those who were lately in power? Their reckless use of the terms 'pro-Hun' and 'traitor' were enough to sicken one. It was un-English and was a sure sign of a biassed judgment. There was no such recrimination on the Somme. What a splendid example the Army set to the people at home!" Every sober-minded man must feel some sympathy with what Colonel Mildmay thus said, but it may be doubted if the ill-mannered truculence which shocked him really did any harm to the *moral* either of the Army or of the Home Front. It was

¹ On this difficult, and much-vexed, question of the relation between a newspaper's proper exercise of criticism and the effect of such criticism upon enemy propaganda, the report of a long and heated debate in the House of Commons on November 30, 1915, may be consulted.

all part of a game which is perfectly well understood by the British people. One of the newspapers which Colonel Mildmay may have had in mind headed one of its tirades "Ginger: that's the stuff to give 'em." Was not the heading equivalent to a wink? There are many who like hot stuff in politics, but few who take it too seriously. If the cry *Nous sommes trahis*, and the demands for impeachment which were sometimes made, had been taken very seriously, great harm might no doubt have been done at home as well as abroad, but they were not so taken. It is all part of the licence of free discussion to which in this country we are well used. And it should always be remembered in arguments about "the Press" that there are papers and papers. Readers who disliked the views, the manners, the tone of one section of the Press could turn to another section in which the former was hotly denounced, or to yet a third section which pursued an equable and gentle course, undistracted by the wordy warfare around it. There is an excellent passage which bears upon all this in an essay by Bishop Creighton, full of that piercing shrewdness of his which some mistook for cynicism. In our country, he said, "there is so much free expression of opinion that we are hardened to it, and give it just so much attention as we think it deserves. We do not understand the sensitiveness of those who have not had the advantage of being born and bred

among these bracing surroundings. I have been asked, when talking with foreigners about their affairs, if my opinions represent those of Englishmen generally, a question which it never occurred to me to ask, and which I could discover no possible means of answering. I have seen a foreigner seriously produce an article from an English newspaper, three months old, as an indisputable proof of England's attitude towards his country. It is very difficult to explain to him that probably every variety of opinion has been expressed since then by the same newspaper, and certainly by other newspapers; and that I could undertake to furnish him with similar proof for any attitude of England which he most desired."¹

To sum up, then. The Censorship left the Press free to discharge its essential functions in war-time. I think that in some respects, and in some of the newspapers, not sufficient care was taken to remember the inter-relation of those functions, but that was not the fault of any restraint exercised by the Censorship; and if it be held that, on the contrary, it was the fault of the licence allowed, I would ask anyone who holds such an opinion both to take a broad view of the activities of the Press as a whole and to consider the alternative.

¹ "The English National Character: The Romanes Lecture, 1896."

On the whole, the Press did excellent service in sustaining the Home Front, in the publication of facts upon which an intelligent judgement could be formed, in the exercise of fearless criticism, and in presenting to foreign countries a faithful picture of its country's case and spirit. No doubt it would have done still better in this last regard if criticism had always been tempered by consideration of its effects abroad, but the alternative policy of tightening the restraint upon the Press would have struck at the roots of its usefulness in war-time.

The policy actually adopted was, as this essay has been at pains to show, one which at once censored the Press and did not censor it. The system was not wholly logical. It was attended by conditions which made the work of censorship extremely difficult, and in some respects inefficient, and it entailed upon the Press much inconvenience and left it with some real and standing grievances. No doubt, if there should ever be another such war—*quod Di et Jus Gentium avertant!*—experience will have suggested improvements in the relations of the Press and a censorship.¹ But the

¹ To discuss such possible improvements is outside my scope here. But I may say briefly that some remedy would have to be found for the grievance discussed on pp. 82-86, above. I think, too, that the work of propaganda should be associated with that of a Press Bureau, and I agree with a contention frequently urged by *The Times* (e.g. October 12, 1915), that the whole business of censorship and publicity should be under the control of one and the same Cabinet Minister.

actual scheme worked. It could not have done so without good will both on the side of the Press and, as I think I am entitled to say, without good will on the side also of those responsible for the Press Censorship. Between them they worked a compromise, whereby in the field which concerned them, a form of restraint, not too strong for the liberties of the people, was yet strong enough to safeguard their essential interests in a great emergency.

APPENDIX

E. T. COOK

THE death of Sir Edward Cook, at the comparatively early age of sixty-two, came as a great shock and grief to his friends and colleagues in the Press, and to all those who were associated with him in his work in the Press Bureau during the war. Though by his own choice he remained in the background, he was unquestionably one of the small company who leave their mark on their time, and his unflagging industry enabled him to do as much in the forty years of his working life as would have taken other men half as long again. He was a man of sterling character and great and varied gifts, being in equal parts student, politician, and man of letters, and in all three displaying a capacity which was the envy of his colleagues and fellow-workers.

For many years after he had gone down, "Cook of New College" left a reputation behind him as one of the best Presidents and smartest and readiest debaters the Oxford Union had ever known, and a brilliant Parliamentary career was generally predicted for him. But journalism laid hold of him as soon as he left Oxford and came to London, and he was gradually absorbed into the *Pall Mall Gazette*, first as an outside contributor in Lord Morley's reign, and then as a member of the staff

under Stead, with Milner and, afterwards, Edmund Garrett for his chief colleagues. Throughout Stead's editorship he was a staunch supporter of his chief, though no two men could have differed more widely in temperament, and the ballast that he applied to Stead's brilliancy and fervour made their partnership one of the most effective in London journalism. Stead was the most talkative of men; Cook very nearly the most reticent I ever knew. The one poured out his innermost thoughts to anyone whose face he happened to like; the other would nod his head vertically or horizontally rather than say "yes" or "no." From midday, when the *Pall Mall* went to press, till three or four in the afternoon, when he took train back to Wimbledon, Stead was in a whirl of callers and took a frantic lunch in clattering company; whereas Cook shut his door with a sigh of relief, when the last proof was through, and opened it again only to a strictly revised list of visitors by appointment. All the queer characters in the world, male and female, especially female, passed up the stairs in Northumberland-street during Stead's *régime*, and it was a shock to the frequenters of the place to find the door closed to them when Cook in due time succeeded him; but Cook had the sense to know that he must produce his results in his own way, and, with Edmund Garrett for a brilliant second, he succeeded remarkably in keeping up the *Pall Mall* tradition, after Stead had departed. His time, unfortunately, was short, for after two years the paper was suddenly bought from under his feet, and converted into a Tory party organ by Mr. Astor. Not to be beaten, he found a friendly and public-spirited proprietor in Sir George Newnes, and set to work without an hour's delay to found another paper which should carry on the tradition and be the lineal descendant of the

“old *Pall Mall*” under Morley and Stead. It was thus that the *Westminster Gazette* came into existence, with Sir Edward (then Mr.) Cook for its first editor, and, with him, practically the whole literary staff which had served under him on the *Pall Mall*. Three years later he left the *Westminster* to edit the *Daily News*, and for five years more he reigned in Bouverie-street; then, after an interval in which he contributed leaders to the *Daily Chronicle*, he quitted regular journalism and devoted himself wholly to the writing of books, and mainly to his *magnum opus*—the great library edition of Ruskin, in which Mr. Alexander Wedderburn collaborated, and to the biography of Ruskin.

Nearly twenty-seven years have passed since he came to Tudor-street as editor of the *Westminster Gazette*, but there are some still at work in the same office who have a vivid and grateful recollection of service under him both on the *Westminster* and previously on the *Pall Mall*. In describing him as reticent, I should give an entirely wrong impression, if this were taken to mean cold or intimidating. His silence was always benevolent, and when his reserve was broken, he talked to his intimates with rare point and humour. No one who had seen him at home with his wife could have doubted that his affections were deeply rooted, or failed to realise the heavy blow which fell upon him when she died. I remember him as the kindest and most considerate of chiefs, with a remarkable range of gifts and interests, which made him scarcely less keen about art and literature than politics. He was a man of deadly accuracy and precision, with a most methodical habit of indexing papers and keeping references, and if he was in any sense exacting it was in requiring the same qualities from those who worked with him. His own writing was crisp

and pointed, well seasoned with allusion and quotation, though very thrifty of rhetoric and purple passages, and his armoury of fact and reference made him one of the deadliest debaters with the pen. To get into controversy with Cook, whether on a political or literary theme, was a dangerous adventure for the oldest hand, for it was impossible to catch him tripping in any matter of fact or to beat him at the game of verbal retort. He had a special skill in short comments, and seldom let a morning pass without contributing two or three notes to the "Notes of the Day" of the *Westminster* or "Occasional Notes" of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. In order to give himself time for these in the crowded hours of the morning, he devised a most ingenious system of joint leader-writing, by which he wrote one half and a colleague the other half of the article; and the scheme was so neatly laid down in his instructions that it was impossible for the reader to discover that two hands had been at work. As a journalist he was utterly out of sympathy with the commercial school, and would accept no contract which did not secure him complete liberty and independence of opinion. He threw up his editorship of the *Pall Mall Gazette* without a moment's hesitation when he was unable to discover the politics of the proprietor who had bought it from Mr. Yates Thompson; he was equally unyielding nine years later when the proprietors of the *Daily News* were divided about his defence of the Boer War. He was a staunch Liberal and Radical, but also a zealous imperialist and devoted admirer of Cecil Rhodes. Stead, Cook, and Garrett between them may be said to have "invented" Rhodes, so far as the British public were concerned, and his devotion to his hero led Cook to be very indulgent about the Jameson Raid, and to become a staunch supporter of the South African War.

Here no doubt the influence of his old friend and colleague, Milner, also helped, but these South African loyalties brought him into collision with a great many Liberals and Radicals, and, as already recorded, led to his withdrawal from the *Daily News*. From that time onwards until Free Trade reunited the Liberal Party, he was an active supporter of the Liberal League, and no one has a better title to be considered one of the founders and promoters of Liberal Imperialism. He held the whole creed, Big England, Big Navy, Open Door, and in all the papers he edited or wrote for he felt it his special mission to educate the Liberal reader in knowledge of the Empire and to wean him from the heresies of Little Englandism.

Many of his friends had hoped that Cook would seek a seat in Parliament when he left the *Daily News*. Had he done so he could scarcely have failed to win a great place for himself. He was an admirable speaker, as appeared on the few occasions—mostly private—on which he let himself be heard, and as a journalist he had equipped himself with a precise knowledge of public affairs which few even of the oldest Parliamentary hands could have rivalled. But it was no surprise to those who knew him intimately that he chose instead to become a man of letters. For eight years he gave the best of himself to the monumental edition of Ruskin. His cult of Ruskin dated from the days when he went from Oxford to report, or rather describe, “the Professor’s” last series of lectures, and from that followed an intimacy which, so far as Ruskin’s condition permitted, continued to his death. That the most copious and unrestrained of English writers should have had the coolest, most cautious, and most critical of writers for his editor and biographer is one of the oddities of literary history, but great good

fortune for Ruskin. The latter prided himself that he had the most analytical mind in Europe, but on this side, at all events, he had his equal in Cook, who analysed the analyst in a manner that would surely have given him exquisite pleasure, could he have watched it. Two other biographies, one of Florence Nightingale and the other of his old friend and assistant-editor on the *Pall Mall Gazette*, show Cook in a different vein. The first is extremely skilful in its handling of a great mass of technical material—necessary to the medical reader and hospital expert—without swamping the portrait of the woman or the heroic episode of her mission to the Crimea. The second is a very touching tribute to friendship, written with a quiet skill which nevertheless revealed the warm heart that the writer of it wore so little on his sleeve. To this time also belong his “Delane of *The Times*”—the best book ever written about a journalist—and the essays and studies which were recently collected and published under the title of “Literary Recreations.” His handbooks to the national collections—the result of infinite labour and pains—are known to all visitors to the National Gallery and British Museum.

Cook was the kindest of men and the most loyal of friends. Touch his heroes or his friends, and he was in arms to defend them at all costs and with a persistency that never forgot. In all his private relations he was generous, modest, and unselfish, and he deliberately chose the quieter path in life and some of the most thankless tasks. When the War broke out, he cheerfully took up the undesired post of Press Censor, and worked day and night through the four years to reconcile the interests of the country with the demands and convenience of the newspapers. What the Press and the country owe to him

for that, and how greatly it helped to have in that position an experienced journalist who knew the ways of journalism, and enjoyed the confidence of other journalists, is even now scarcely realised. Undoubtedly these labours undermined his health and shortened his life. He himself would not have done otherwise, if he had reckoned the full cost. To end his useful and honourable life with a vitally important but quite unostentatious piece of public service would, in fact, have been precisely what he himself would have chosen.

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